Stourbridge
CHRONICLE

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TRAGIC END TO FAMILY'S SEARCH

Report By Richard Guttridge

THE family of missing man Matthew Gill said they are suffering 'unbearable sadness' as it was confirmed he had been found dead.

A seven-week hunt for the 43-year-old from Stourbridge ended on Sunday afternoon as his family received the news they had been dreading.

The body of Mr Gill was found in woodland off Prestwood Drive, near Stourton, close to where his car had been found weeks earlier. It brought a tragic end to the search for Mr Gill who had not been seen since leaving his home at 9am on October 6. Police said his death was not being treated as suspicious.

His disappearance sparked the Find Liggy appeal, which saw friends and family carry out searches after Mr Gill's silver Smart Roadster car has been found off the A449 at Prestwood.

Matthew Gill

Mr Gill's devastated partner, Annette Woodhouse, said in a statement: "It is with unbearable sadness that we must let you know that our search for Matt is over. At this awful time, we would really appreciate you giving Matt's family and friends time to come to terms with this news and to grieve in private."

Ms Woodhouse recognised the incredible effort that had been made to find her partner since he vanished.

Remember

She added: "Matt has inadvertently created something extraordinary at the end of his life. Please always remember how he pulled everyone together, friends and strangers.

"To honour Matt's memory please always remain kind and look out for others. We will never forget your contribution."

Wolves and West Bromwich Albion also joined the appeal to find Albion fan Mr Gill by showing his image on big screens at their football grounds.

Colleagues from B&Q in Kidderminster, where Mr Gill worked, had also helped by distribution posters nationwide. Kingswinford truck firm JJX Logistics had place a huge 'missing' poster on the side of one of its lorries.

IT'S A LIGHTS FANTASTIC START WITH TV FAVOURITE

Hundreds of people turned out to see Coronation Street star Antony Cotton, who plays Sean Tully, switch on the Christmas lights in Stourbridge

CORONATION Street actor Antony Cotton pushed the button for Stourbridge's Christmas lights switch-on. The TV star, who plays Sean Tully, switched on the town's lights on Saturday.

But it didn't go quite according to plan – with the lights already on for around ten seconds before the actor actually pressed the button.

But the hundreds who packed out Market Street didn't seem to mind as they lapped up the festive atmosphere, after the actor greeted them with: "Alright Stourbridge. Can someone put the kettle on it's freezing.

The Bury-born television star had ironically predicted the mishap as he appeared on stage, saying: "I've been told I mustn't press this big switch yet or the lights will come on, but if you believe that you'll believe anything."

Fans clamoured for selfies with the popular actor before he waved a swift goodbye.

CHRISTMAS

Strictly star will launch Dudley's festive display

TELEVISION and radio presenter Alison Hammond will switch on Dudley's Christmas lights this weekend.

The This Morning and Strictly Come Dancing star will be doing the honours in Market Place at around 5pm on Saturday.

The 42-year-old Brummie former Big Brother contestant will be playing the Fairy Godmother at Malvern Festival Theatre panto Cinderella from December 14 to January 7.

Birmingham-born celebrity Alison Hammond

SHOOTING

Hunt on for suspect after gun goes off

POLICE are hunting a suspect after a man was left with serious head injuries and another was shot in the arm when violence flared in Stourbridge at the weekend.

It is understood that trouble started after a man arrived at an address in Vauxhall Road armed with a gun in the early hours of Saturday. The weapon is said to have gone off accidentally, wounding a 39-year-old man in the arm.

A 24-year-old man received serious head injuries in a fracas and was taken to hospital where his condition was said to be improving.

Three men and a woman were arrested at the scene but later released without charge.

Anyone with information is urged to call police on 101 or Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111.

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STATUS QUO – AFTER RICK

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Under threat refuse tip could be saved

A TIP earmarked for the axe could be rescued after it emerged it could be bought by Dudley Council.

The authority is considering approaching Wolverhampton Council about the possibility of taking over the Anchor Lane site near Coseley, which is due to shut.

Dudley Council leader Patrick Harley revealed running Anchor Lane was an option being considered to provide a tip for people living in the north of the borough.

He said the move could also mean retaining Stourbridge tip and scrapping plans to find a new main dump for Dudley.

Wolverhampton Council wants to shut its two tips, which include Anchor Lane, in order to create a 'super dump' in the city.

But the closure would create a problem in Dudley, where the council currently pays Wolverhampton so its residents can use the facilities.

Central

Dudley leaders announced plans to close the Stourbridge tip on Birmingham Road earlier this year when Labour were in charge as it wanted to find a more central location in the borough.

However, proposals to make the Leys Road depot in Brierley Hill the main tip ran into difficulty when it was subsequently ruled out when the Conservatives took control of the council in May. Councillor Harley said a deal with Wolverhampton Council remained as just one option and no discussions had yet been held.

He said: "We are inquiring as to whether we could purchase that site and still retain Stourbridge.If we could retain Wolverhampton and charge them to use it, it would pay for itself."

Oliver Bhurrut, a spokesman for Wolverhampton Council, said discussions into the future of the city's waste sites were ongoing.

He said: "The future of our two existing tips is very much part of these deliberations."

Patient wins payout over surgery blunder

A FATHER from Dudley has received a five-figure payout after he suffered a cardiac arrest when an anaesthetist left the operating theatre as he was undergoing surgery.

Adam Bennett, aged 48, had gone to Russells Hall Hospital for routine surgery when he went into cardiac arrest, forcing the procedure to be abandoned. Russells Hall has apologised after the incident sparked an investigation and resulted in legal action.

The anaesthetist was subsequently disciplined and referred to the General Medical Council over the 'inexcusable' blunder.

Adam Bennett

Lawyers claimed that if the doctor had been present at the time of the cardiac arrest, drugs could have been administered, which could have prevented it and ensured the surgery continued.

Mr Bennett, from Lower Gornal, had been left unattended for two minutes during urology surgery.

Lessons

He said he was stunned when he found out what had happened during surgery in April 2015, after having put his 'faith' in the medical team. He insisted he wanted 'lessons to be learned'.

He said: "If everything had gone to plan I should have been out of hospital that day, but I needed days in hospital to recover and another procedure booked in for July."

Diane Wake, chief executive of the Dudley Group NHS Trust, apologised to Mr Bennett.

She said: "We accept that the temporary absence of the anaesthetist during Adam Bennett's procedure was inexcusable and that if he had been present the situation would have been managed differently."

Rotary plan for a purple crocus spring

Planting – Stourbridge Rotary President Tony Blackman with President-elect Andrew Scuddamore

THOUSANDS of flower bulbs have been planted around Stourbridge town centre as part of a campaign to raise awareness of polio.

Stourbridge Rotarians were out in force on the ring road last week planting 7,500 purple crocus corms as part of the Purple4Polio project.

The purple crocus is a symbol of Rotary's worldwide campaign to eradicate polio. This is because the colour represents the purple dye used on the finger of a child to indicate they have received the vaccine.

The Rotary Club of Stourbridge, as part of Rotary International, supports the campaign along with the Bill Gates Foundation and other international agencies.

The club purchased the bulbs from Purple4 Polio.and all the funds will go towards the eradication of the disease.

The campaign has been described as one of the finest humanitarian projects in the world and Rotary has even been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize

By planting the corms in a prominent location on the Stourbridge Ring Road the club are raising awareness of this important campaign, whilst improving the environment for all those who drive past when they flower next spring and for many years to come.

More information about the campaign can be found at www.rotarygbi.org/what-we-do/purple4polio or for information on the Rotary Club of Stourbridge visit www.stourbridgerotary.org website.

Telephone boxes face the chop

MORE than 100 telephone boxes are facing the axe across the region with Dudley borough the worst hit part of the Black Country.

Figures show that in Dudley 18 are set for the chop, while in Wolverhampton 11 are to go, 14 in Sandwell, and 17 each across South Staffordshire and Wyre Forest are under threat.

Telephone boxes still handle 33,000 calls a day throughout the country but BT are planning to remove around 20 000 in the next five years.

But the telecoms provider must inform the public and consult with the local authorities if they plan to shut them down. Councils then have 90 days to object, which is known as a 'local veto'.

BT say the rise of mobile phones is making phone boxes redundant.

But Wolverhampton Liberal Democrats are calling on councils to use the veto. They say the booths are still used by children, the elderly, people who can't afford mobile phones and in emergency when phone batteries go flat.

Campaigner Paul Butters said: "I'm really seeing red over these plans to axe something vital from our streets. Rather than removing these phone boxes BT should focus on making sure everyone can access a phone signal wherever they live."

Hundreds sign road petition

A PETITION signed by hundreds calling for action on a road where a mother was killed has been handed to Dudley Council chiefs.

MP Ian Austin and residents living on or near Wood Road, Lower Gornal, are demanding safety measures following the horror smash which killed 30-year-old Vikki Jones in September. It comes after a survey of residents found many were worried about their safety due to the speed of vehicles.

Mr Austin, Labour MP for Dudley North, said: "After the tragic fatal accident on Wood Road many people got in touch asking for action to tackle speeding cars. Hundreds of residents have signed a petition demanding measures to prevent anything like this ever happening again."

MP to open church festival of trees

ST Michael's Church in Brierley Hill will have its Christmas Tree Festival opened on Saturday by Dudley South MP Mike Wood at 11am.

The festival is free of charge to attend and will be open from until 1pm on Saturday.

Arrest after dog thrown to its death from balcony

A TEENAGER has been arrested on suspicion of animal cruelty after a dog was thrown to his death from a balcony of a flat in Tividale.

The Staffordshire bull terrier was found at the foot of an 18-storey residential tower block.

Signs put up at the scene in Wallace Close, by the RSPCA, stated that the pet 'fell to its death from one of the balconies' at about 6pm on November 8.

Following a joint investigation, West Midlands Police said a 19-year-old man was being questioned on Monday about the incident.

A resident at the council-owned tower block, who declined to be named, said a woman had found the dog lying outside Darley House tower and called the police.

She added that the animal had 'belonged to a nice old couple' and described what had happened as 'awful'.

A police spokeswoman said: "Officers have arrested a 19-year-old man on suspicion of animal cruelty after a dog was found thrown over a flat balcony.

"Upon arrival, officers found the deceased dog and began investigations into tracing the owner.."

Andy Robbins, regional media manager, said: "The RSPCA would like to thank members of the local community following a positive response to an appeal for information."

Woman's leg was broken in collision

A WOMAN was hit by a car in the Black Country, suffering a broken leg.

The victim was taken to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham after being hit at the junction of Bunns Lane and Birmingham New Road, near Tividale, close to the busy Burnt Tree junction.

The Midlands Air Ambulance landed near the scene but the injured woman was eventually taken to hospital by land ambulance.

The accident happened on Firday at around 1.40pm and led to traffic delays in the area.

West Midlands Ambulance spokesman Jamie Arrowsmith said: "We treated one patient for a leg fracture. She was fully concious and was taken to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital."

Order is doubled

A BRIERLEY Hill company making hardtops for pick-up trucks is celebrating after an order was doubled in size. Truckman is supplying 50 more of its RS Hardtops for rental group Europcar UK's Toyota Hilux fleet.

Call to hurry up demolition of 'eyesore'

Cavendish House – to be bulldozed

AN EYESORE office block in Dudley town centre, dubbed a health and safety hazard, needs to be demolished as soon as possible, says Dudley Council leader Patrick Harley

Councillor Harley said a planning application to knock down Cavendish House is expected before Christmas.

He says the empty building is the final hurdle in the way of multi-million regeneration plans to redevelop Dudley town centre, which will tie into the arrival of the Midland Metro and expansion of Dudley bus station.

"Dudley Council and the developer are at one in believing the building needs to be demolished as soon as possible," he said. "I think it is a real health and safety issue."

The site is expected to be used for a multi-million-pound development consisting of retail, leisure and commercial enterprises.

It will tie into the Midland Metro tram line being brought to Dudley town centre as part of the network's extension from Wednesbury to Brierley Hill. Dudley bus station is also set to be expanded to create an interchange with the tram line.

A planning application for demolition was expected earlier this month but councillor Harley says the complexity of the project had caused delays.

He added: "As soon as the demolition takes place, people will believe we are really going to spend money on revamping the town centre.

"We will be able to get on with the job."

He expects the demolition to take place 'early next year'.

The former office block, on Trindle Road, has been empty for years.

Woman who hid killer is jailed for six years

A WOMAN from Dudley who sheltered the man who murdered teenager Kenichi Phillips is starting a six-year prison sentence.

Shaleana Samuels, 25, hid Isaiah Wright-Young at her flat in Dixon Green Road for nine days in October last year. He wore a burka on his arrival to disguise his identity from CCTV cameras.

She had previously denied the offence and three unrelated counts of possession with intent to supply drugs but later admitted she had told police a pack of lies and on Monday pleaded guilty to all four offences.

Wright-Young, 36, was jailed for life in April for the fatal shooting of Mr Phillips as he sat in a parked car in the Ladywood area of Birmingham in March last year.

Shaleana Samuels

The killer was discovered at Samuels' flat by police seven months later. His co-accused Disharn Downie, 18, was jailed for 21 years.

Police also found crack cocaine, heroin and cannabis at the flat, some in Samuels' bedroom and some hidden behind a panel in her kitchen, with a total street value of £8,230. Mobile phones showing evidence of drug dealing and £2,805 cash were also discovered.

Samuels, of Elmbridge Way, who was studying for a healthcare apprenticeship, initially told police she had no idea that Wright-Young was involved in anything criminal and allowed him to stay after he told her he'd had a row with his girlfriend. She later claimed she knew he was involved in criminality but was not aware he was wanted for murder. Changing her story yet again, Samuels said she was pressurised by an ex-boyfriend who was in prison to provide a refuge for Wright-Young.

Judge Patrick Thomas, QC, said he did not believe she did not know Isaiah-Young was wanted for murder but accepted she was influenced by her former boyfriend with whom she was still infatuated.

It's animal magic for zoo workers

Apprentices Mary Taylor, of Stourbridge and Harry Upton, from Halesowen, have joined the zoo full-time

APPRENTICES Harry Upton and Mary Taylor have landed full-time jobs at Dudley Zoo.

The pair have secured their dream jobs as trainee keepers after impressing zoo bosses with their hardworking attitude since joining the team at the Castle Hill attraction at the start of the year.

Harry, from Halesowen, said: "When I was told I'd got the job it was easily one of the happiest moments of my life." The 21 year-old works on the zoo farm and has moved into on-site staff quarters.

He added: "I'm looking forward to the opportunity of working with different kinds of animals during my career, although for the moment, I'm very happy working with the camels."

Mary, from Stourbridge, said: "It's so amazing as zoo keeping is something I've always wanted to do." The 17 year-old has recently moved from our bird section to join the ungulates team.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Police appealing for witnesses

POLICE continue to appeal for witnesses over two vicious attacks which saw people aged in their 60s and 70s assaulted in Dudley last month.

A 64-year-old man was severely beaten and tied up with wire during a robbery at the Black Bear pub in Lower Gornal. Two masked men who were armed entered the property early on November 12 and made off with cash. The following day a 75-year-old man was hospitalised after being stabbed in the shoulder while walking in Kings Street, Dudley.

A West Midlands Police spokesman said: "Enquiries are ongoing and we are still appealing for witnesses."

Strong ale is toast of beer festival

DUDLEY Town Hall was packed over the three days of the annual Dudley Winter Ales Fair.

The 33rd annual event, run by the Dudley and South Staffordshire branch of the Campaign for Real Ale, was opened by Mayor of Dudley Councillor Dave Tyler. It offered more than 80 beers as well as bottled international beers and real cider and perry.

The beer of the festival winner was Full Centurion, a 10 per cent strength beer from Kinver Brewery with Marston's taking second place with 7.6 per cent brew Owd Rodger.

Geologist's work is recognised

WORK promoting the heritage under the Black Country has led to Dudley Council's geologist being honoured.

Graham Worton, who has worked for Dudley Council for 17 years, has also been closely involved with Dudley Museum for more than 35 years.

Mr Worton has been awarded the Brighton Medal, awarded every three years to a geological curator by the outgoing chair of the Geological Curators' Group. Mr Worton said: "I must share this award with all the colleagues, volunteers, visitors and students I have worked with."

Hang out with Hang Ups star at club night

COMEDIAN Tom Wrigglesworth, from BBC Radio 4 show Hang Ups, tops the bill for a Christmas comedy special night in Stourbridge.

Wrigglesworth headlines the bill at the Fitz of Laughter Comedy Club held at Katie Fizgerald's pub tomorrow night. Also features are Aaron Twitchen, Riordan Patrick, Morgan Rees and Rory Jones.

Dudley's Wayne Beese hosts and tickets cost £10.

COUNTY NEWS

Search on for best bus drivers

THE search is on to recognise the region's best bus drivers. Arriva wants to say a huge thank you to the bus drivers who provide such a vital service to passengers in the Black Country and Staffordshire.

The annual Made A Difference (M.A.D) awards aim to celebrate the work done by Arriva staff and thank individuals for their hard work.

If nominated, your local bus driver could be invited to a glamorous gala dinner to find Arriva's Bus Driver of the Year . To nominate, visit www.arrivabus.co.uk/doty, with the first round of nominations closing on Friday December 15.

Big otter-tunity to join wildlife study

A WILDLIFE trust is looking for volunteer otter spotters to help survey the River Stour.

Hannah Lewis, from the Birmingham and the Black Country trust, recently discovered signs of otters at a housing development. It is the first time signs of otters have been spotted at the location. Now the Trust wants to survey the river to see where otter populations are thriving to get an idea of which parts of the Stour are in good health – and which are not.

Anyone who ishes to volunteer to become an otter spotter across various locations on the River Stour can call Hannah on 0121 523 0094.

Foreigner foray for blues star Jo

BLACK Country blues star Joanne Shaw Taylor is set to support rock icons Foreigner on their upcoming UK tour. She will also be joined by artist John Parr at Birmingham's Symphony Hall on May 15.

The artist is also set to headline the Saturday of Planet Rockstock in Trecco Bay on December 2.

The Wednesbury-born guitarist will appear alongside the likes of Monster Truck, Dan Reed Network, King King and Thunder.

Toolstation branch opens for business

TOOLSTATION has announced the opening of a new branch in the West Midlands.

The new Toolstation is at Unit 2, Ionic Business Park, Birmingham New Road, Dudley. It is open for business seven days a week, from 7am to 7pm Monday to Saturday and 9am to 4pm Sundays. Previously located in Great Bridge, all business and employees transferred to Dudley.

1. Tink often stops to say hello to Bob the goldfish

2. Teddy's confused between a dovecote and a dove cat

3. African pygmy hedgehog Flossy in her woolly nest

4. Bear loves to bite toes and chase around the garden

5. Tortoise Fred lives in the garden and just loves eating buttercups on the lawn

6. Bags of room in here – Benji finds this is a comfortable place to bed down

7. Together – four-year-old guinea pigs Billy and Tom share a very special bond

8. Reeves and Mortimer who were always up to mischief when they were kittens

9. Olaf the rabbit was found in a carrier bag in a tree. Here he is with best friend Anya

10. Milo, a Staffie cross, came from the Dogs Trust and loves doing agility tricks

YOUR TIME TO VOTE

WELL the time has come for you readers to have your say.

For weeks we have been bombarded by lovely pictures of your treasured pets – and we thank everyone for taking the time to send in all the wonderful entries.

We have already carried some of the entries in our weekly pets competition page throughout all our seven editions.

There was so much choice it was difficult for us to pick out the final 10 for the shortlist.

Variety

All of them so cute and obviously so loved. The pride shone through in the emails we received – some sending in more than one picture of their special pet.

The variety of pets has been huge – lots of cats and dogs, turtles, ponies, hamsters, tortoise etc. Noah could have filled his ark several times over!

But now it is decision time. On the right is the voting form with all the details our readers need to let us know which is their favourite.

We will carry the pictures again next week and the winner will be announced next month with the best-loved picture carried on the front of our Christmas editions. And the winner will also receive a £100 cash prize.

We are not just looking for the cutest pet – although some are very difficult to resist – but the best picture itself, one that you would pick out if you saw it in the paper.

So look closely at the 10 shortlisted pictures and choose the one you think deserves the prize.

We will be counting up the votes after the second week of running the shortlist. Entries must be in by Monday, December 12.

This is your chance to have your say!

ANIMAL CRACKERS

To vote for your favourite photograph either email the picture number to sue.attwater@expressandstar.co.uk or tick one box on this form and send it to Sue Attwater, The Chronicle, 51-53 Queen Street, Wolverhampton, WV1 1ES.

PICTURE 1 ☐	PICTURE 6 ☐
PICTURE 2 ☐	PICTURE 7 ☐
PICTURE 3 ☐	PICTURE 8 ☐
PICTURE 4 ☐	PICTURE 9 ☐
PICTURE 5 ☐	PICTURE 10 ☐

Mother's gift helps with grief

THE heartbroken mum of a stillborn baby has donated a special cot to a hospital to help other grieving parents.

Kiera Pooler, from Brierley Hill, raised enough cash to pay for the £1,600 device which she handed over to the neonatal department at City Hospital in Birmingham.

The CuddleCot is a portable device that circulates cold air around babies who are stillborn or die shortly afer birth, to allow parents precious time to be with their baby before leaving the hospital.

Kiera was 27 weeks pregnant when she found out her son, who she named Rogan-Lee, had died.

Both Kiera and her partner Jake Hildred, aged 22, got to spend time with their baby after he was born at Russells Hall Hospital, in Dudley, because it had a CuddleCot.

Healthy

The 21-year-old, who has since had a healthy baby girl called Leila-Mai, now aged 15 months, explained: "Jake and I were able to have that extra time with Rogan-Lee after he was born, and it meant so much to us.

"My family also got to see him. However, at the time, there was only one device there and there were five other parents who had babies that were born sleeping that day."

Since the tragedy more than two years ago, Kiera has carried out various activities to raise the money.

She added: "Once I had raised enough money Sands (Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Charity) put a call out to find out which hospitals were in need of the cot. City Hospital came forward and so I was delighted to make the donation to them."

Burglar jailed for 20 months

HOODED burglars battered their way into a ground floor flat with a crow bar, a judge heard.

The raiders broke a lounge window and climbed in to the Western Road, Stourbridge property, Mr Howard Searle, prosecuting, told Wolverhampton Crown Court was told.

The man who lived at the flat ran away before the intruders could reach him. "They then thought better of it after breaking a TV that was in the room," continued the prosecutor.

Police forensic checks on blood found by the broken window matched it with the DNA of 35-year-old Danny Boden from Chapel Street, Wordsley, who also tested positive for cocaine.

Boden, who had several previous convictions, admitted burglary and was jailed for one year eight months.

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Projects get vital boost of £130,000 in funding

TWO major developments have moved a step closer after crucial funding to get them off the ground was agreed.

Up to 450 homes are to be built at the Bilston Urban Village site, while a £30 million university centre will be created in Dudley, under ambitious plans to transform the region.

Members of Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership voted to award more than £130,000 to allow site investigations to begin for both projects. Preparations are anticipated to start next year.

The Bilston homes plan would see hundreds of homes to be built on brownfield sites alongside around 34 acres of land which has been earmarked for public open space and nature conservation.

Engineering

Dudley College's centre is set to provide a major boost for skills in the Black Country, providing the expertise needed by local industry.

The facility would offer degree-level training in engineering, manufacturing and transport technology.

Chief Executive for the Black Country ConsortiumSarah Middleton said: "This bid will augment the existing skills provision in the Black Country region in that it will provide specialist training facilities that respond directly to the needs of local industry."

Hit-and-run charges denied

A 28-year-old man has pleaded not guilty to dangerous driving and causing grievous bodily harm after a suspected hit-and-run near a Stourbridge primary school.

Kevin Campbell, of Vickers Walk, Stourbridge, has been released on bail and will next appear at Wolverhampton Crown Court on December 20. He was charged with eight offences relating to September 19, 2016, on Hob Green Road near to Hob Green Primary where two three-year-old children and two adults were hurt.

Campbell appeared at Walsall Magistrates' Court last week charged with one count of driving a motor vehicle dangerously and seven of attempting to cause grievous bodily harm. He pleaded not guilty to each offence.

Santa at Hillcrest

HILLCREST School and Community College in Netherton holds a Christmas fair tomorrow afternoon (Friday), from 3.30 to 5.30. There will be a special appearance by Santa and his Elves. Hot turkey cobs available.

New bosses are needed to run venue

Inside Cornbow Hall at Halesowen

COUNCIL bosses are looking for community groups to take over Halesowen's Cornbow Hall as part of cost-cutting plans totalling nearly £100,000.

Dudley Council says the move will save tax-payer's £96,000 a year and breathe new life into the Hagley Street venue.

The business plan is based on an a similar venture at Brierley Hill Civic Hall, which has seen the landmark building revitalised after a community group took over its day-to-day running. That venue now attracts big names from the comedy world. But council bosses are warning applicants must show a strong business plan to ensure the site remains secured for future generations.

Councillor Ian Kettle, cabinet member for planning and economic development, said: "We have some fantastic community groups using the Cornbow Hall now for popular events and it is only right we look to build on that.

"A community group running the venue could give this venue fresh impetus to bring in new acts which will in turn help bring even more people to the town. We have already proven this approach can be very successful with Brierley Hill Civic Hall going from strength to strength.

"But it is important we find the right group who share our vision."

The chosen group would organise shows and other events at the venue while the council keeps ownership of the building. Groups have until December 15 to register an interest. Visit www.dudley.gov.uk for more details.

College show interest in Hippodrome site

THE saga over Dudley Hippodrome took another twist when Dudley College confirmed it was interested in the landmark building's Castle Hill site, if current plans to revive it as a venue fail.

But college bosses admit they have no interest in preserving the 1938-built theatre and would purely be striking a deal for the site next to Dudley Zoo.

Black Country Hippodrome Ltd, a group dedicated to rescuing and reviving the former venue, have been given a lease on the building by Dudley Council.

They stepped in to save the historic venue, which in its heyday hosted such stars as Laurel and Hardy, when it was revealed that a previous council administration wanted to bulldoze the site and use it as public open space.

But the group faces a tough task raising funds and is now waiting to discover whether its request for a 20-year extension to the five year lease, which they say is necessary to attract the required investment, will be accepted.

Discussions

Meanwhile college principal Lowell Williams has held informal discussions with council officers regarding the site's future.

College spokeswoman Debbie Goode said land at Castle Hill would be ideal for the college's plans, which include a £30 million university centre to provide skills needed by local industry.

Ms Goode explained: "The college hasn't got an interest in running the Hippodrome but the land it sits on is part of the whole development corridor."

Steve Daniels, of the Black Country Hippodrome group, said: "They can talk to who they want but it's not ethical when we are going in there. It's not how you do business."

Councillor Ian Kettle, cabinet member for planning and economic development, said: "We have had an informal conversation with Dudley College, who have made it clear they may be interested in the site, should it ever become available."

Pitch perfect investment at stadium

Councillor Ian Kettle at the Dell Stadium, where work is under way on a 3G artificial football pitch

WORK has begun on a new artificial football pitch costing £660,000 in Dudley.

It is being provided at the Dell Stadium in Pensnett and will replace the previous artificial grass pitch, which had been used for 18 years.

Dudley Council says the facility will be in use for many years to come, thanks to the project funded by the Football Association and Football Foundation, which gave £550,000, and the council, which invested £110,000.

Work on the pitch started last week and should last for around three months.

Existing users have been temporarily relocated to other sites in the borough and the Saturday morning ParkRun has been suspended for the duration of the works,

Councillor Ian Kettle said it was part of the council's wider investment in leisure services.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Rotala in £2m Hotel Hoppa deal

TIVIDALE-BASED bus and coach operator Rotala has conditionally agreed to buy National Express's Hotel Hoppa business for £2 million.

The passenger transport business operates between Heathrow Airport and hotels within a five-mile radius.

The acquisition includes the right to use the business' name, its goodwill, contracts and a fleet of 32 buses.

The £2m is to be funded from Rotala's existing resources adn the firm expects sales of £6m from the acquisition and pre-tax profit of £200,000 in the first full year of ownership.

Rotala operates the Diamond Bus services around the Black Country.

Groups to help the vulnerable

BLACK Country churches and charities are coming together to support vulnerable families.

Love Black Country wants to help churches to deal with the needs of families by linking individuals in congregations with the experts ready to help them.

In what is believed to be the first initiative of its kind in the UK, Love Black Country is working with four charities – Home For Good, Safe Families For Children, YMCA Open Door and Transforming Lives For Good. See loveblackcountry.org website.

Plenty of laughs at comedy nights

THERE'S a funny week ahead with controversial comic Jerry Sadowitz at Wolverhampton's Slade Rooms tomorrow (Friday) and Ed Byrne at the city's Wulfrun Hall on Saturday. Russell Brand talks about fatherhood and much more besides at the Symphony Hall on Tuesday.

The next Live At The Civic night at Brierley Hill is on February 17, a double bill featuring Justin Moorhouse and Gary Delaney. Also on the bill are Scott Bennett, Lindsey Santoro and MC Waybe Beese. Early bird tickets are £10, see www.bhillcivic.co.uk

Pub festive market for Make A Wish charity

A PUB in Dudley is to host at Christmas market to raise money for seriously ill children.

There will be more than 20 stalls selling gifts at the Branford Arms on Park Road, Woodsetton,on Saturday, December 9. Entry is free.

Money raised by the event will be donated to the Make a Wish Foundation, which helps makes dreams come true for children suffering from serious illness.

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IN MY VIEW
with Mark Andrews

No way is student chav party 'classist'

WHEN I read that a group of students at Birmingham University were organising a chav-themed Christmas party, my initial thought was "where can I get a ticket?"

Getting blinged up, putting on a bit of fake sportswear and expressing dubious social attitudes, sounds a right lark.

Not everyone is amused, though, it seems. English student Gina Murfin lodged a formal complaint, saying the event was "so blatantly classist and distasteful it's difficult to know even know where to begin."

She also accused her fellow students of "making fun of a demonised and marginalised area of society." Not one for overdoing the hyperbole then?

A few things spring to mind. First of all, what has it got to do with class? Moreover, don't you need to possess a certain amount of money to truly embrace chav culture?

For example, all that gold jewellery doesn't come cheap, particularly the way the commodities markets have gone over the past decade. And quaffing all that strong lager, have they not seen alcohol duty lately? And that's before we get to the sugar tax. Former lottery winner Mickey Carrol styled himself King of Chavs, and he wasn't short of a bob or two.

Secondly, are chavs really a demonised and marginalised community? I would have thought the whole point of being a chav was that they are the ones doing the demonising and marginalising. I don't see blinged up louts as a vulnerable minority.

But more important than any of this, what is a "classist"? Look in the dictionary. There's no such word. And this girl's studying English.

❒❒❒

WE seem to have lost a lot of much-loved figures over the past year or two, but the death of Likely Lads star Rodney Bewes seems particularly sad.

In his later years he was a regular performer in this area, and he didn't bother with an agent or public relations officer. If he was in town he would telephone himself, and politely ask if we could give him a bit of publicity. He would then turn up in an old Ford Mondeo, with his scenery strapped to the roof rack or on a trailer.

He was saddened by his rift with co-star James Bolam, particularly the fact that Bolam distanced himself from The Likely Lads, seemingly believing it would harm his reputation as a serious actor.

Which is rather a shame. Because I can't help but think that 20, 30 or 40 years from now, The Likely Lads will be remembered much more fondly than New Tricks.

Soaring population: Time the Government got a grip

Jo Brand – reality telly at its most heart-tugging where stars are felines

Sajid Javid – claims that baby boomers are "living in a different world"

Biologist Sally Le Page – surprised at use of a divining rod to find a water main

No, baby boomers are not to blame

THE BEST OF PETER RHODES

SO it's all our fault. Somehow I guessed that the housing shortage would eventually be blamed on us of the privileged, pampered post-war generation. Communities Secretary Sajid Javid says we baby boomers are "living in a different world" when we dare to question the need for millions more houses to be built. Really? Or maybe we live in the sort of world where, when a country's population has soared from 50 million to 70 million in a single lifetime and is growing at 500,000 a year, we expect the Government to get a grip. Most of Britain's social, housing and transport problems are the direct result of our soaring population - and yet the Government has no population policy. The problem is not selfish pensioners. It is stupid politicians.

DON'T believe anyone who claims to understand the Budget on Budget Day. All the little nasties are hidden away in something called the Red Book and will probably come to light a few days later, maybe at about the time you are reading this. It's that oh, **** moment.

IN this age of impersonal, soulless banking, I loved the tale from a reader whose little garage business was struggling some years ago. He went to his bank manager for a small loan and explained his cash-flow problem. The manager opened his drawer and tossed his car keys to him with the words: "I've got a new car on order. Sell this one for me and take a cut for yourself." No loan, no interest, no paperwork. Just fond memories of a simpler and more humane age.

TELLY has ticked all the schmaltz boxes and flicked all the weepy switches with Jo Brand's Cats & Kittens (C5). This is reality telly at its most heart-tugging where the stars are felines, the plot is all about horrible injuries and miraculous recoveries, and the presenter is that plump lass everybody loves. The icing on this extremely sugary cake is that it's set in Britain's most sentimental city, Liverpool. Having put all the aah-factor ingredients together so well, where does C5 go next? I had a brilliant idea about fluffy little orphaned baby hamsters being taught to sing Christmas carols by Aled Jones. What could possibly go wrong?

SALLY Le Page, described as "an evolutionary biologist at the University of Oxford and an award-winning science communicator and YouTuber," was surprised to hear that two Severn Trent workers were using a divining rod as they tried to find a water main near her parents' home. She has duly tweeted against this "mediaeval" practice and is "astonished" to discover that other water companies use the same techniques. Frankly, I'm astonished that she's astonished. Isn't it well known that water companies and many private citizens use divining? Over the years it has been reported in many TV and newspaper features. How can anyone become an evolutionary biologist at Oxford without knowing such things?

I HAVE a friend who is a dowser. I can't produce any scientifically acceptable proof that it works, but he makes a reasonable living at it, which suggests he has a fair success rate. I once had a go with his divining kit and, as a fully paid-up sceptic, was surprised at the "pull" on the L-shaped rods swivelling in biro tubes. It could have been self-delusion or I may have stumbled upon an underground stream, who knows? But if I were a Severn-Trent worker with a van stuffed full of hi-tech leak-detection devices which do not always work perfectly (because that's how real life goes), I might be tempted to carry divining rods, just as back-up. Where's the harm and what's the problem?

ONE Guardian website reader put it admirably: "When did science become so shrill and intolerant? " I bet the answer is when science took over from religion. They both have their inquisitions.

OUT of a chilly, windy day and into the warmth of the hairdresser's where the clippers (number three all over, since you ask) are soon humming merrily against my skull. I ask the hairdresser whether any customer has ever fallen asleep. 'Happens all the time,' she says. 'It's very therapeutic.' Offhand, I can't think of any other therapy that costs a fiver for ten minutes.

IT was the hairdresser who pointed out that, no matter how dark and gloomy the days are, the winter solstice is only four weeks away. One of the strange things about our calendar is how early midsummer and midwinter fall. Spring? It's just beyond that black cloud . . .

AND I have no idea what happened to September's confident predictions that Britain could suffer six named storms before Christmas. We have seen only two and one of those was a damp squib. Either we are in for a truly horrendous December or this is yet further proof that trying to forecast the weather more than a week ahead is a mug's game.

TALKING POINT

No one is immune to falling on hard times

FOOD banks are used by scroungers and asylum seekers and are magnets for those just looking for free food – according, sadly, to outspoken and somewhat deluded opponents of the facility.

And while many of us may shake our heads at such insensitive and ill-conceived ideas it is probably fair to say we don't really know who does use food banks, but don't think it's people like us.

What wishful thinking to believe it won't happen to us, that we are unlikely to have to turn to food banks for help. In truth it could happen to anyone – and for a number of reasons.

A study from researchers at Oxford University and King's College London, looking at those who use the Trussell Trust network of food banks – which has given out 586,907 three-day emergency food supplies to people in crisis in first half of this year – found five out of six people were out of work and one in five had slept rough in recent months.

Ill health was common, while half of households using the food banks included someone with a disability and a third had mental health problems.

Eighty-seven per cent were born in the UK and four per cent had a degree – with the heavy debt of student loans hanging over their heads too. It's fair to say that the vast majority of those using food banks were on low incomes and more adversely affected by life changes.

However, any one of us could find ourselves out of work. Bad health is indiscriminate or we could suffer an injury and be left unable to work. What about those whose lives are turned upside down by divorce or family tragedy?

Latest figures are quite clear too that delays in making payments to people legitimately entitled to benefits under the controversial Universal Credit payments system have caused misery. Referrals to the trust in the first six months of the year were up by 13 per cent to 587,000 people, including 209,000 children.

One family from Hednesford recently donated £250 to the local food bank. Their reason? Both the mother, who was a nurse, and the father, a headteacher, had relied on such charity in the past.

No-one is immune to hard times and changing circumstances. Donate now to support those in need of a helping hand – just as you would hope the community would support you should the cruel finger of fate strike at any time.

● The Express & Star and Chronicle are running a Feed A Family This Christmas appeal in support of food banks and the homeless. Visit www.expressandstar.com/news/feed-a-family/

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Better transport is key to prosperity

AT last the Government has given the money for the extension of Midland Metro from Wednesbury to Brierley Hill.

Hopefully this project can now move forward at a rapid pace, so that Dudley gets the improved public transport service to Birmingham the borough deserves.

But why do public transport projects in the West Midlands take eons to happen?

It is to the credit of Andy Street that movement is at last happening. However Greater Manchester have managed to build a network across their conurbation in the time it has taken the West Midlands to build one line and a short extension of it across Birmingham city centre.

There are proposals for other schemes throughout the West Midlands, for example further extensions of the Metro in the Black Country, the Camp Hill rail line and high quality bus corridors. If the West Midlands Combined Authority is serious about getting people out of their cars then high quality mass transit has to be provided.

The congestion across Birmingham and the Black Country is affecting the economy and public health through air pollution. We cannot waste time producing endless strategies and plans, which seems to be what has been done for 20 odd years with little to show.

It's clear what has to happen in order to get the West Midlands moving. The authorities must make it happen quickly so our region prospers and becomes a decent place to live.

KEVIN CHAPMAN
Chair, West Midlands Campaign for Better Transport

Hospital parking problems

THE main road past Russells Hall Hospital in Dudley has double yellow lines on both sides, and white 'hash markings' down the centre. Despite these precautions, inconsiderate motorists park.

A few days ago, while travelling along this road on a bus, I counted 16 vehicles parked, and at least three parked the wrong way (facing on-coming traffic).

Do these people not even think of passengers in ambulances being taken for urgent treatment?

Yesterday, as we passed on a bus, there were only four cars, but there was a council van, presumably dishing out parking tickets; serves the blighters right.

They should be charged £200 each, then the cars crushed if they do not pay.

There should be more off road parking available for the hospital.

PETER COLE
Kingswinford

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

POST
Dudley Chronicle,
Chronicle Editorial,
51-53 Queen Street
Wolverhampton, WV1 1ES

EMAIL
dudley.chrons@expressandstar.co.uk

Letters should be brief and MUST include name, address and telephone number. The Editor reserves the right to condense letters.

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Get rid of the weeds

ISN'T it time Dudley Council found some money to empty the flower beds in Stourbridge of weeds.

Every week I hope someone will notice but the weeds keep growing, and growing. Surely we have employees working in the parks who could be given this task and at least make a difference.

A PEDMORE RESIDENT
(name supplied)

Games should benefit Dudley

THE prospect of the Commonwealth Games coming to Birmingham is great news but will the Black Country heartlands benefit from it?

Smethwick (not really part of the Black Country – sorry but it's true!) looks to be set for a multi-million pound investment in a purpose-built swimming centre. But it already has one, recently refurbished.

Sandwell has spent millions on its five leisure and swimming centres, does it need another one?

In contrast Dudley is the poorest borough for investment in public amenities with its three ageing leisure centres for nearly a third of a million people – about the same as Sandwell. Isn't it time that Dudley got a share of the spoils?

The long overdue investment to extend the Metro to Dudley is an ideal opportunity to link the town to a mainline railway station as its first priority, connecting it to the rest of the national rail network.

Dudley's Castle Gate has a wealth of hotels, entertainment and restaurants to offer visitors from the Commonwealth.

So I ask Dudley MBC, and everyone who believes in fairness, to stand up for the town of Dudley.

We have as much right to take advantage of the Games' opportunities as other places, and I would say a better case and more to offer than Smethwick – sorry but it's true!

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Heritage project aiming to transform ironworks

Volunteers and, right, founder and trustee of Riverside House, Lloyd Stacey, on part of the ironworks site

YOUNGSTERS will be at the centre of a project to bring an historic former ironworks in Stourbridge back to life as a hub for healthcare training.

Plans have been lodged for Riverside House in Wollaston, where the Riverside Stourbridge Community Interest Company will work to help people develop practical skills on the site.

Lloyd Stacey, managing director, said that work would get under way soon, now that more than £80,000 funding is in place.

Mr Stacey has 16 years' experience working with young people who have complex developmental difficulties, autism and mental health.

He explained: "Riverside House is a perfect environment that caters for the requirements of a wide range of individuals through engaging in practical skills by means of the actual restoration and conservation of Riverside House.

"Meaningful activities in small sociable teams have a proven efficacy in providing improvements in well-being, self-esteem, communication skills, social inclusivity and improved physical health."

The 19th century ironworks will be transformed into a heritage centre with gardens, restaurant, crafts shop, woodland and workshops.

Mr Stacey added: "This is an amazing project that will transform the area."

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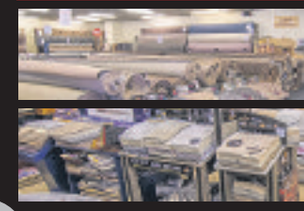

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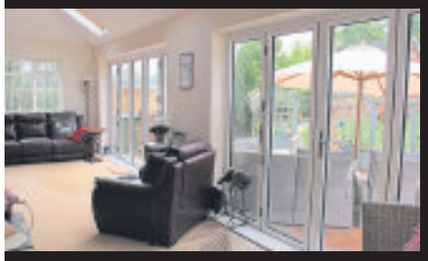

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Blundering burglar chose the wrong shop to raid

A BURGLAR blundered when he raided a shop, not knowing it was run by a man he had robbed several years earlier.

Craig Poole and another man broke into LD Communications in Quarry Bank High Street during the early hours of June 4, Wolverhampton Crown Court heard.

The pair caused more than £1,000 damage pushing a panel out of a door before climbing through the hole into the premises, said Mr Geoffrey Dann, prosecuting. They ransacked a mobile phone display and escaped with around £500 worth of phone covers.

Owner Luke Dyas was astonished when he checked CCTV camera footage of the break-in and recognised one of the burglars as the man who had robbed him almost seven years earlier.

The 31-year-old criminal was put on a wanted list but was not caught until he struck again, this time breaking into Heatflow Contracts n Pedmore Road, Brierley Hill, on July 16.

He smashed a window to gain access and escaped with a large haul including tools, a compressor and sets of keys for two vehicles parked outside. Poole drove off in one and soon returned for the other but was traced through their tracker devices.

He had 35 previous convictions for 69 offences, most serious of which had been the robbery of Mr Dyas, for which he was jailed for 30 months in 2011.

Mr Simon Hanns, defending, said Poole had been devastated by the murder of his cousin Ryan Passey in Stourbridge. He added that crimes were committed to fund a heroin habit.

Poole, of Lodge Crescent, Netherton, pleaded guilty to the two burglaries and given a 14-month jail term suspended for 18 months with 80 hours' unpaid work and two-month curfew.

Superfast broadband at new homes

MORE than 100 homes in the Black Country will see their broadband speeds soar, according to a developer.

Around 150 properties at Redrow's development in Throne Road, Rowley Regis, will be gaining access to superfast broadband with speeds up to 80Mbps – more than double the UK average – where previously their typical speeds were less than 2Mbps.

Openreach will be investing alongside Redrow Homes for around 3,000 premises on housing developments, bringing fibre broadband to the first tranche of residents by October next year.

Redrow Homes chief executive John Tutte said: "We saw the potential of a national co-funding agreement with Openreach for homes we'd previously built that had lower than average broadband speeds."

Views from the past for new year calendar

Grandmother Jan Herp with her calendar recalling views from a Black Country town's past

A RETIRED teaching assistant has turned her hand to art with a calendar of drawings showcasing how a Black Country town once looked.

Jan Herp, aged 61, from Netherton, has pencilled 12 scenes showing Wednesbury scenes in the 20th century and compiled them in a calendar for 2018. Grandmother Jan grew up in Wednesbury.

She has sold several of her calendars to Black Country expatriates in America, Germany and Spain.

She also hopes that her pictures may inspire memories for elderly people with dementia as well as nostalgia for the Wednesbury of yesteryear. She said: "I would like to thank all the folk who have supported me, an ode Wednesbury wench, with my artwork and placed an order for a unique calendar."

Find out more at Jan H Art on Facebook.

More activities for disabled youngsters

A CHARITY which runs activity sessions for the disabled has launched a group for children in Dudley after receiving a four-figure grant.

Dudley Inclusive Activities won £1,061 from Heart of England Community Foundation to launch a group for young people unable to take part in its regular activities.

Sessions held every fortnight at Stourbridge Leisure Centre welcome children who struggle to take part in larger group events, and their families, to enjoy games, soft play and art.

The foundation, a grant-making charity that is the only one of its kind in the region, has distributed more than £122,000 to projects across the Black Country since April.

Greg Southall, of Dudley Inclusive Activities, said: "We hold a variety of activity sessions, but these are not always suitable for some children and teenagers.

"Our new group is aimed at those who are unable to take part in our regular provisions – many of which are severely autistic and have very limited communication – and enables them to take part in smaller activity sessions with their families. The new group is already proving to be incredible popular and we are already looking into the possibility of running this weekly rather than fortnightly."

Rattlesnakes are ready to rock Brum

HIGHLY-RATED live band Frank Carter and the Rattlesnakes, who last week released new single Spray Paint Love, are in concert at Birmingham's O2 Institute on Saturday night.

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A Likely Lad's fame was tinged with sadness

AT the height of his fame, Rodney Bewes partied with Mick Jagger, stayed in Paris with Omar Sharif, and drove around swinging London in a white Porsche.

Yet the actor who died last week aged 79 often gave the impression that he was more content rocking up at Stourbridge Town Hall in an old Mondeo, with his devoted wife Daphne helping him carry his equipment.

Back in the1960s and 70s, Bewes and James Bolam were the rock-stars of television comedy. Their appearances in Dick Clement and Ian La Frenais's The Likely Lads, and its sequel Whatever Happened To The Likely Lads? were watched every week by 27 million viewers.

However, while for Bewes the hit sitcom about two young lads growing up in the north-east of England was the pinnacle of his career, for Bolam it was the stepping stone to a career as a serious actor.

Rodney Bewes on stage at Stourbridge Town Hall

Bewes, right, with co-stars Wendy Richard, James Bolam and Wanda Ventham

Drama

While Bewes was happy to bask in the reflected popularity of his character Bob Ferris for years to come, Bolam was keen to forget about his years as cynical Terry Collier, moving on to gritty drama When The Boat Comes In, and later The Beiderbecke Affair and New Tricks.

When asked if he thought he would be best remembered for his role in The Likely Lads, Bewes said: "Actually it is the only thing I am remembered for. But at least I'm remembered for something."

In his later years, he did several tours based around the life and works of Walsall-born author Jerome K Jerome, and spoke about his fondness for Stourbridge Town Hall in particular.

"It's a little gem hidden in a traffic island," he once said, referring to the town's infamous ring road. "You go round and round in circles looking for it, and then inside this great big traffic island you find this gem of a little Victorian theatre, it's a lovely setting and they are lovely people."

Bewes was happy with a simpler life, although he was upset by Bolam's refusal to allow The Likely Lads to be repeated on mainstream TV, depriving him of an income in his later years. He joked that his wife – who died two years ago after a stroke – had changed her name to 'Poor Daphne' because she was always clearing up while he was reminiscing about the show.

Well into his 70s, he was still paying his mortgage and overdraft, and remarked that he was often amused by the reaction of other people when they saw him travelling by bus. Right up until the end, he was troubled by his rift with Bolam, who had refused to speak to him since he made an ill-judged joke in 1976 about his co-star becoming a father.

Bewes tried to bury the hatchet with his old friend, but said that all attempts were rebuffed.

He also said tht he would have loved to have brought The Likely Lads back for a third outing, along the lines of two elderly friends – but Bolam would have none of if. Bolam, aged 82, says there was no feud and they had simply lost touch.

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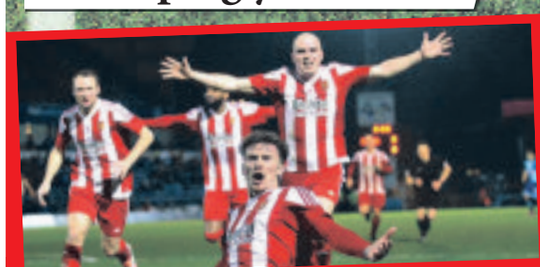

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Masters of trades are an inspiration to all

Sculptor Luke Perry, of Wordsley, was among the masters of crafts celebrated at Saturday's event

A WEALTH of talent in the form of award-winning authors, designers, green-fingered gardeners and inspiring athletes was put on display at a unique event.

The Black Country's best were celebrated at the 100 Masters one-day pop-up festival in the heart of Wolverhampton on Saturday.

Stars such as Sathnam Sanghera, Ellie Simmonds, Hugh Porter and The Fizzogs were among the list of those honoured at the event.

Taking place at Starworks Warehouse, in Frederick Street, the day offered visitors a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see the work of 100 different Black Country creators.

Kerry O'Coy, who was behind the Creative Black Country initiative, said: "The campaign started around 18 months ago and we started to ask for names of people brilliant in what they do. We had hundreds of nominations and then commissioned artists to represent them in a variety of different ways. It is incredibly diverse.

"The masters range from those internationally recognised to those who are little-known, such as a shop owner from Wolverhampton."

Wolverhampton author Sathnam spoke about the BBC adaptation of his book The Boy With The Top Knot and growing up in the city, while music came courtesy of Conrad Gail's choir.

Hugh Porter, who was recognised as one of the nine sporting masters, said: "As a proud Black Country boy this is a fantastic honour."

Eighty-year-old printer John Neave displayed a selection of his original works and spoke about how technology has still not put him out of business.

One of the masters in gardening, 'Cactus' Stan Griffin, from West Bromwich, displayed some of his greatest home-grown cacti. The shortlisted Masters were chosen via a panel selection process and came from a dazzling breadth of backgrounds, ages and areas of the region. For details, please go to the website 100masters.co.uk

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Pleased to help – oh yes we are!

Supporters – Jack and the Beanstalk panto stars Adam C Booth and Ian Adams visit the newspaper offices

A HOST of stars have come out in support of our Feed A Family This Christmas food banks appeal with readers rallying to help the cause.

Superstar boy band The Vamps were among the big names to back the appeal and urge readers and communities to donate items.

Singer James McVey, who was at the Merry Hill centre for the Christmas lights switch-on, said: "It is a great idea and a good cause."

And panto stars Ian Adams and Adam C Booth stopped off at the Express & Star and Chronicle offices in Wolverhampton before switching on the city's Christmas lights to offer their support to the campaign.

Ian, who plays Dame Trott and Adam who is Simple Simon in Jack and the Beanstalk at Wolverhampton's Grand Theatre, also appealed for more donations. Their fellow panto star Lisa Riley helped launch the appeal and support has also come from such names as Slade legend Dave Hill, auctioneer Will Farmer and Olympian Joe Clarke. Meanwhile a kind-hearted Cannock market trader has offered to collect food and other items.

Anne Franks sells a variety of goods for a different charity each week on her pop-up stall at Cannock Indoor Market and has offered to use the stall to collect for Feed a Family.

The stall is adjacent to the Market Cafe. Items can be donated every Friday and Saturday until the end of the campaign on December 16.

The campaign aims to help the homeless, those who need the support of food banks and women helped by The Haven refuge in Wolverhampton.

The non-perishable food will be handed to food banks and other charitable organisations across the Black Country and Staffordshire. Readers can donate festive food, and basics including canned goods, long-life milk, fruit juice, rice and non-food items, toiletries, baby supplies, new socks and small presents are also welcome.

THE DROP-OFF POINTS:

Express & Star Wolverhampton, 51-53 Queen Street, WV1 1ES; Express & Star Cannock/Walsall office, Queen Square, Cannock WS11 1EA; Oldbury office, Black Country House, Rounds Green Road, Oldbury, B69 2DG.

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Meetings to be held at new venue

Grange (E) Guild

CHAIRMAN Chris Holton presided over the Grange (E) November meeting – held for the final time at Grange Court, Stourbridge.

She welcomed 28 members and one guest. Minutes from the previous meeting were read, approved and signed as a true record.

Chris announced that meetings would no longer be held at Grange Court, but would move St Peter's Centre in Pedmore Lane, Pedmore. The Christmas party will be at this new venue on December 5. There is no meeting in January but from February they will be held every second Tuesday.

West Midlands Federation is holding a Christmas celebration at St Thomas' Church, Market Street, Stourbridge on December 9, from 2.15pm. Tea and mince pies will be served in the church hall afterwards.

The speaker for the evening gave a very interesting talk with slides entitled 'Nature in Focus' which covered all aspects of the nature around Wyre Forest along with some coastal areas. Members enjoyed every minute of the talk. The vote of thanks was given to Rosemary on members' behalf by the chairman.

Refreshments were served by hostesses Margaret Blower and Joan Biddlestone and their helpers.

The raffle was then drawn with three lucky winners. The sales table had a Christmas theme with everything being sold.

Councillors stand in as MP called away

Dudley South Ladies Luncheon Club

Councillor Karen Shakespeare, Luncheon Club committee member Pauline Berrington, chairman Ann Rogers, and Councillor Steve Clark

AT the November meeting chairman Ann Rogers was delighted to welcome a record number of members and three visitors, namely Margaret Adams and Councillors Karen Shakespeare and Steve Clark, who came along to speak to members in the absence of MP Mike Wood who had had to leave for London to address a Sepsis Conference.

Following an excellent three-course lunch Councillor Clark spoke about his family and career before becoming a councillor and the challenges he faces managing a budget of £750 million. He explained some of the future proposals of the council, including building a new leisure centre in Dudley and refurbishing others. Both he and Councillor Shakespeare were keen to bring improvements to Dudley and answered lots of questions from members ensuring a lively end to the meeting.

The Christmas meal is on December 8 with entertainment by the St Andrews Singers and 2018 will start on January 12 with Derek Coates on Walking in Wensleydale followed by Terry Church on Village Memories on February 9.

Sensory bands aid patients

Sedgley Morning TG

THE Sedgley Morning TG are supporting Alzheimer's Society as their charity of the year, and members have been knitting sensory bands.

The bands are sleeves that have attachments added to them, and they are used to calm patients with dementia or Alzheimer's by giving them something to do with their hands. The bands will be part of a presentation to the society at a guild meeting in February.

President Ricky Jackson with long-serving member Dave Oakley

Sylvia and Tony Maidment from Stourbridge

Jay Adkins from Kidderminster with his van

Performing on the night is Thom Peterson

Shane McDermott, of Penkridge, and Mark Harrington,Wolverhampton

David Oakley with a pic of him aged 17

At front – David Oakley, Mark Harrington, Ricky Jackson and Adam Cooper

Picture of the Circle founder Neville Sackville

Magical way to mark 70 years

IT was started way back in 1947 when a year's membership and joining fee cost just 52.5p.

Now, 70 years on, the Wolverhampton Circle of Magicians is marking its anniversary.

The group, which has more than 50 members, hosted an event to celebrate the occasion. It was held at the ECC Sports and Social Club in Showell Road.

Current and former members shared memories of the group, also showing off photographs and tricks.

The club began as magic took a hold of the country following the Second World War.

A group of magicians led by Donald Crombie, a solicitor based in Wolverhampton, first met on November 19,1947 and founded the Wolverhampton Circle of Magicians.

The vice president was Jasper Maskelyne. Over its history it has included famous magicians including Len Belcher, who joined in 1948 and was the author of three books on magic.

Tony Shelley, who later become president of the British Magical Society, was also a member. The club is today made up of a range of magic artists from clowns to mentalists to card dealers.

Members meet for lectures and to share magic on alternate Wednesdays at the ECC Sports & Social Club.

Those wanting to join the Circle must first present their magic before membership is granted.

Don't be an accidental law breaker in the garden

THOUSANDS of British gardeners are at risk of becoming unwitting criminals due to a lack of knowledge of basic gardening laws, experts have claimed.

Now experts from GardenBuildingsDirect.co.uk have published the top seven little known gardening laws to help Britons understand what they should and shouldn't do in their gardens.

The list covers common issues such as overhanging branches, boundary disputes, blocked sunlight and wind fallen fruit, among others.

Gardeners could be forgiven for finding the laws confusing, as they can be counter-intuitive and complex.

For example, a person may cut back tree branches that overhang into their garden, as long as they do not go past the boundary line and there is no tree preservation order in place.

But they cannot keep the trimmings nor any fruit or flowers on them – nor can they throw the branches back into the tree owner's garden without permission.

Disputes over boundaries may require a hard look at the house deeds, and even then, there may be issues if the boundaries have changed over time.

There can also be confusion over whether it is legal to allow a tree to block sunlight to a window.

A spokesman for GardenBuildingsDirect.co.uk said: "Most of us want to be good, law abiding neighbours, but that can be difficult if we don't actually know what the law is.

"There may be times when it would be within your legal rights to do something, but it could cause tensions with your neighbour.

"We'd always advise trying to come to a neighbourly solution first, as this is always preferable to having to call in the lawyers.

"If you brush up on the law as it stands, you may be able to avoid any sort of dispute altogether, which is always the ideal solution."

The experts' top seven little-known gardening laws are:

TRIMMING OVERHANGING BRANCHES

If a tree's branches overhang into your property from a neighbour's, you can trim them, but only up to the property line. You can't lean into the neighbour's garden to do this, though – this constitutes trespass.

If a tree is covered by a tree preservation order, you can't cut the branches.

FRUIT AND FLOWERS

Although you can cut branches that hang into your garden up to the property line, they still belong to the neighbour – as do any flowers or fruit on them. Your neighbour is legally entitled to demand them back.

But do not just throw them into the neighbour's garden, as this could constitute garden waste fly tipping.

WINDFALLS

Wind fallen fruit technically still belongs to the person who owns the tree. So, if your neighbour's windfalls end up on your lawn, ask for permission if you want to keep them.

FALLEN LEAVES

Tree owners are not responsible for sweeping up fallen leaves that land on your property.

TREES BLOCKING LIGHT

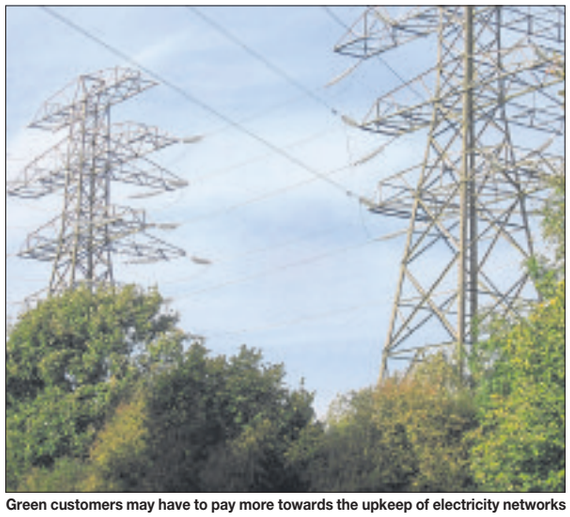
Under the Rights of Light Act, if a window has received natural light for 20 years or more, neighbours can't block it with a new tree.

FENCES AND BOUNDARIES

These can be tricky to resolve. The house deeds should indicate who owns fences and is responsible for boundaries (although there is no legal responsibility to keep boundaries well maintained, unless the deeds state otherwise). But boundaries can move over time and cause disputes later. You may need to contact HM Land Registry for help with boundary disputes.

HEDGES

If a hedge grows along the boundary between two gardens, both neighbours are responsible for trimming. If a hedge belonging to a neighbour grows into your garden, you can trim it but, as with tree branches, you must return the trimmings to the owner.



Green customers may have to pay more towards the upkeep of electricity networks

Energy costs proposals 'a tax on caring citizens'

A PLAN to put up the energy bills of a millions households who have installed solar panels has been criticised by an expert as an unacceptable tax on caring citizens.

Green householders pay below average towards the upkeep of the electricity networks because they generate their own power on sunny days and use less supplied via the mains grid. They also benefit by selling back their extra energy produced. Regulator Ofgem has said the present decades-old system is unfair because on dark winter evenings the off-grid customers still have to draw as much power from the electricity networks as their neighbours who do not have solar panels.

But Ron Fox, of Noreus Ltd in Staffordshire, said: "Conscientious people who are moving over to green energy to cut their global footprint and help save the planet are being penalised.

"With carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere at the highest for 800,000 years and with the problem of limiting warming of the earth to the agreed 1.5C above pre-industrial levels these residents should be praised, not punished for their actions."

At present, households pay an average of about £120 a year towards the upkeep of the electricity networks. This is levied as part of the unit rate that suppliers charge for power supplied via the mains grid, meaning that the more a household buys, the more it contributes to the grid costs. Now Ofgem wants to overhaul the way Britain's electricity networks are funded and has begun consulting on a new system that it wants in place by 2020/21.

One of their proposals is to make all households pay a fixed fee for their grid connection, or a charge linked to the maximum capacity they draw from the network at peak times. This would probably mean that homes with solar panels would pay more than they do now.

Mr Fox is encouraging owners of solar panels to contact Ofgem and object to the proposals for higher bills for green householders by phoning 020 7901 7295 or emailing consumeraffairs@ofgem.gov.uk

Look after all your tools before winter 'hibernation'

Report by Hannah Stephenson

AS winter sets in, now is the time to think about putting your garden tools into hibernation.

But before stowing them away, you'll want to give them a thorough clean too and sharpen them up – and maybe consider throwing out the old and investing in some new ones for next season.

Here are 5 things to consider...

DON'T LEAVE TOOLS OUT IN THE RAIN

If you want your gardening tools to last, then don't leave them out in the rain and cold or they will deteriorate – metal will rust and wood will rot.

With any tool, you need to clean the soil off it before storing, oil any moving parts regularly, and sharpen the blades of knives, shears and secateurs, so they make a clean cut every time.

Blades can be wiped with an oily rag before prolonged storage, and need to be kept dry to avoid rusting.

MAKE SURE YOU REMOVE ALL TRACES OF SAP

They should be wiped with a damp cloth and washing-up liquid to remove any sap, which can make the cutting surfaces sticky and prevent a good cut next time.

Dried sap and rust can be also be removed by rubbing the blades with wire wool, before oiling them lightly. Secateurs should be left with their blades open to dry thoroughly before putting them away.

When hoes and spades become blunt, either sharpen them by hand or on a grind stone.

THINK ABOUT REPLACEMENTS

If you haven't looked after your tools and they've had it, what replacements should you buy?

Well, if you can afford it, go for top quality, and if not, just go for the best you can afford, as cheap tools only last a few seasons.

If a new spade is needed, go for one that suits your size. A huge, heavy spade may look impressive but won't be easy to work with if you are small. Go for the one that you feel comfortable with and which suits your height.

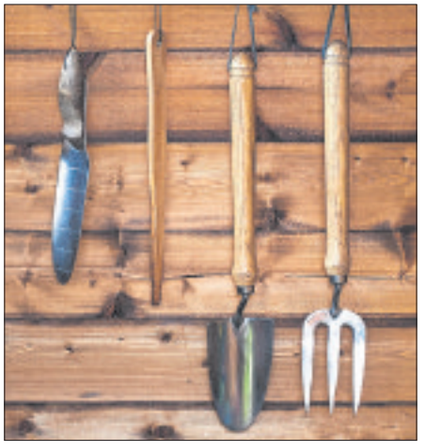
A good spade should be made of hardwood which is splinter-free. Check that the shaft, especially where it meets the metal shank, is smooth. The old-fashioned D-shaped handles are often the most comfortable. Check the same things if you are buying a new garden fork.

GO FOR COMFORT

If you are replacing hand tools, buy stainless steel ones with comfortable handles that don't create blisters. Spend a little bit more on a pair of good-quality secateurs and they can last you a lifetime if you look after them.

Remember, in general, you should not use secateurs to cut stems that are any thicker than your finger.

Take care of your garden tools to get the most out of them in spring



Make sure your tools are stored away safely in the dry

Sharpen blades such as garden shears

When looking for a new trowel, go for one that is strong, rather than admiring the colour of the handle. Cheaper versions will bend if you are digging into heavy soil, especially where the handle meets the blade. Trowels should be used vertically to take out a hole, rather than horizontally like a flour scoop.

Of course, you will need shears if you have hedges to trim, but make sure they're not too heavy and that the cutting action is smooth.

If your tools are still usable, there are things you can do to improve their performance. Tighten the blade tension of garden shears to improve their cutting, and remove and sharpen the blades of other pruning tools.

As you have done the last cut of the season, it may be time to service your lawnmower. Also, it's a good time to check electrical equipment, as many plugs, sockets and leads deteriorate with use in the garden.

TIDY THE SHED

Once you've had a good clear-out of the shed, you may find space to put up racks and shelves so you can neatly store your newly-cleaned tools, rather than just leaving them on the floor.

That way, there is less chance of accidents through treading on rakes, hoes and other sharp instruments. Plus, invest in a series of galvanised or plastic-coated wire tool racks for the wall and you'll never have to hunt for your fork or trowel again.

Then, when the busy period of spring arrives, you'll have all the tools for the job – and know they're all in working order.

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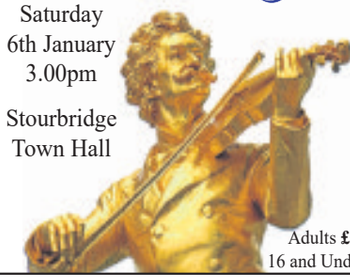

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Gordon – crowned world's top impersonator of the King

Gordon Hendricks in Bridgnorth in 2014

Fans all shook up by Elvis tribute

WITH a swing of the hips and a flick of his quiff, Gordon Hendricks looks every bit Elvis re-incarnated as he saunters onto the stage.

Recently crowned the world's top impersonator of the King, you'd expect him to be a dab hand at getting the audience all shook up, and Hendricks does not disappoint.

At the start of December, he will be at Bridgnorth's Theatre on the Steps for not just one, but three nights – all of which have been sold out for months. And it's not the first time he's appeared at the Stoneway Steps venue after performing the King's classics on a number of occasions in the past.

Few of his fans would have been aware that Hendricks' path to stardom was partly forged just down the road in Wolverhampton, where he appeared at the city's Grand Theatre recently.

Ian Reddihough, artistic director of the Bridgnorth theatre, which regularly hosts tribute acts to some of music's most biggest icons, said: "He's just come back from Ultimate Elvis where he won the world's best Elvis award. He's one of, if not the best in the world.

"Gordon has been appearing at the theatre for years and won Stars In Their Eyes in 2005. Every year he plays at the Theatre on the Steps he's sold out six months in advance.

"He's a very good impersonator and well-loved by a lot of people. He regards the Theatre on the Steps as his home. We put the tickets on sale and within two weeks they had all sold out. That's 540 tickets in total."

Hendricks' manager is Alan Clayton, of Shropshire, and was once part of a so-called 'Golden Age' of music in Wolverhampton

He used to be a director of entertainment agency Astra International and ran the city's infamous Club Lafayette, which hosted top acts including the Sex Pistols before closing its doors in the early 1980s. Along with his fellow agency directors, Alan managed the likes of the Montanas, Light Fantastic, the Californians and pre-Slade band the N'Betweense.

OMG OMD still sound fresh after 39 years

OMD, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

IT'S a testament to the musicianship and longevity of synth pop outfit OMD that whilst most of their '80s contemporaries live on past glories, songs from 13th album are greeted by their fans with as much enthusiasm as those from their 39-year-old debut.

Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark, like their stadium-filling peers Depeche Mode, have avoided the nostalgia circuit.

The quartet based on the partnership of Andy McCluskey and Paul Humphreys opened with Ghost Star from new album The Punishment Of Luxury, followed by the pulsating Isotype. But they didn't neglect their hit-studded past.

Fans at a full-house Symphony Hall were treated to Messages, Tesla Girls, Enola Gay, Joan of Arc, Maid of Orleans, So In Love, Locomotion, Sailing On The Seven Seas and, for final encore, Electricity. And McCluskey still has those manic dance moves.

Following a fans' vote, they performed the rarely heard Radio Waves from the Dazzle Ships album.

The unassuming Humphries took over vocal duties on the gorgeous Forever Live And Die, Souvenir and new song What Have We Done, the latter proving they can write them like they used to.

LEON BURAKOWSKI

The audience follow heroine Clara's journey to a fantasy land of toy soldiers

Show cracks it as perfect festive curtain-raiser

REVIEWS

The Nutcracker, Birmingham Hippodrome

WHAT a Christmas cracker! Birmingham Royal Ballet's production of The Nutcracker is an unbeatable way to start the festive season. It has been delighting families at the theatre for more than 25 years and it hasn't lost an ounce of its magical charm and fabulous feel-good factor.

Full of sparkle it serves a feast for the senses with opulent costumes, lavish sets and Tchaikovsky's superb score perfectly performed by the Royal Ballet Sinfonia.

There was an air of excitement for the opening night with many budding ballerinas in the audience dressed in their pretty party dresses. And they weren't disappointed as they followed the heroine Clara's journey to a fantasy land of toy soldiers, giant rats and snow fairies after she was transported there following a magician's visit on Christmas Eve.

It's a fast-moving spectacle with plenty of contrasting sets to showcase the dancers impressive range of athletic talent and artistic style. From the energetic to the elegant, the classic to the comic, the mood changes from scene to scene keeping the audience enthralled. All eyes are on the dancers but the crew behind the scenes conjure up stunning special effects including the Christmas tree and fireplace transformation, the snow scene and Clara's flight through the clouds.

Special praise for Celine Gittens' elegant and poised Rose Fairy while Momoko Hirata as the Sugar Plum Fairy and Cesar Morales as the Prince danced their duets with precision and flair.

The Nutcracker runs at the Hippodrome until December 13.

MARIA CUSINE

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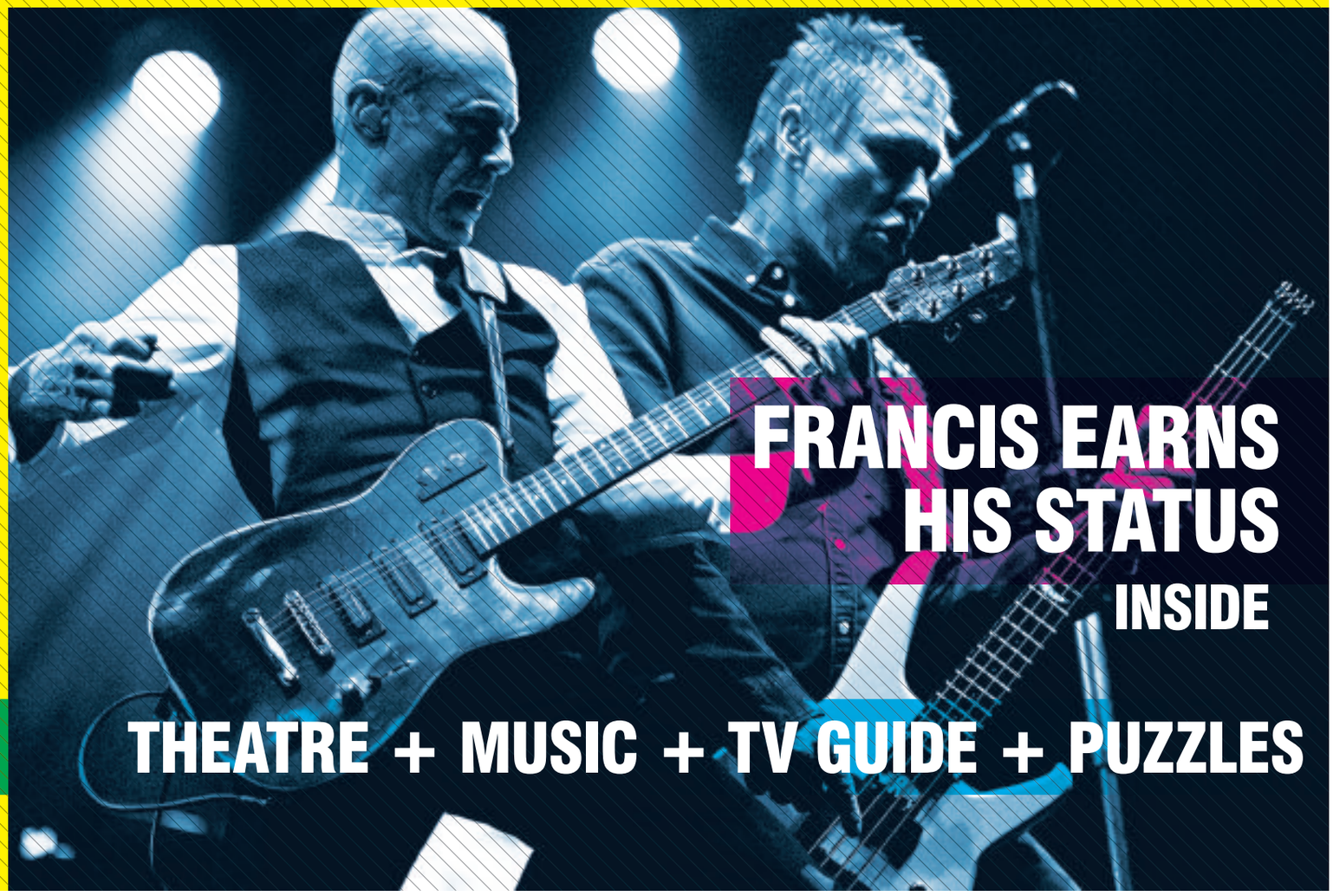

FRANCIS EARNS HIS STATUS

INSIDE

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The stone now takes pride of place over the fire place in the Cornbow Room.

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The Aldridge and Beaumont Suites are adjacent on the first floor and are usually used as one room for larger parties, ideal for formal weddings due to its open plan layout.

For civil ceremonies where the guests for the ceremony are 100 or less the ceremony is usually conducted in the Beaumont Suite whilst the removable wall is in place between the 2 Banqueting Suites and then the room can be opened out for the Wedding Breakfast and evening guests.

For civil ceremonies where the guest numbers exceed 100 both rooms can be open and used for the service and can accommodate up to 200 guests for the service.

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Francis: It's not the same without Rick

There's only one place to start: the death of his bandmate of 50 years, Rick Parfitt. Francis doesn't mind. He knows he's got to talk about it, that Status Quo will forever be him and Rick, that their stories and history are forever linked.

And though he's chipper about being back on the road with Quo – they play Wolverhampton's Civic Hall on Sunday – he's dutiful and respectful on the subject of his late, great bandmate.

"It's been a challenging time and it's been confusing."

Rick's place has been taken by Richie Malone, the band's new touring guitarist. He's had a profound effect.

Francis says: "If you'd have said to me this young fella will make a lot of difference to the way the band feels and plays, I'd have said don't talk rubbish. People said it was all over and we weren't doing any more show. But things change. I didn't expect it to happen. We're enjoying the shows immensely. We've just got back from Australia and Dubai and apart from the jet lag that's been great.

"I'm looking forward to it all. I really did not expect to be in this position or feeling this way."

He realises he'll get stick from diehard Quo fans, that they'll resent him for moving on and not forever wearing black.

"I understand if people are thinking I'm a schmuck. But I don't want to apologise about feeling good about the band. I don't know why it's so good: maybe it's because there's something to prove. It's not the same as it was with Rick, it's just different. There's a certain vibe within the band.

"Maybe we'd become complacent. Rick's health issues were going on for a few years and that made things difficult. Perhaps that happens to all older bands."

He's conscious of growing older, of entering the autumn of his career. But he's proud to be on the road at the age of 68. He's still got the moves, still got the voice and still loves playing the songs that have stood the test of time.

"It all moves on. The Stones were once the most rebellious band in the world and now they're 75. They've survived.

"I'm sixty-bl***y-eight. But something else is going on. You can tell I'm chipper. My manager is in the desert somewhere. But when I speak with him I'm la la la.

"We're not sure what's next. We may do another rock album, which I said I would never do. This business is great at making you go the other way. You say you're not going to do this and that. As we get older, we're worried about dribbling, but we go back to being the young person we were. That insecure little show-off in me is trying to prove something.

"I look forward to the gigs much more. That makes me question was I not looking forward to them before. It's not the same without Rick. It can't be."

His memories of Rick's passing are vivid. "It started in Turkey. As much as he died on Christmas Eve, really, he died in front of us in Turkey. He was on the floor and the medics told me he'd gone. I uncrossed his feet, they were crossed over. I watched what those people were doing to him. Our relationship was well documented. It was frosty sometimes but generally it was quite good. The PA who was with him saved him in Turkey.

"It was really quite horrible what the medical profession did to bring him round. He left the room dead but by the time we were back in London, he was sitting up and having a cup of tea. But then it was clear there was something that was wrong. That was when I thought 'Oh no'. So we got the new boy in. Rick said: 'If I kick the bucket, get him in'. We laughed about it, that was the relationship we had."

Still rocking – Francis says performing is not the same without Rick

The relationship between Francis and Richie took a while to develop. At first, Francis was frosty with the incoming, looking at him as though to ask what he was doing standing in his partner's place? But the ice slowly melted and the band moved on.

"It happens. We die and everything carries on. I've lost two aunts and an uncle recently. As soon as I come out the funeral, I go to the studio and carry on. But the thought was difficult, carrying on. As I said, something happened. Some people think we shouldn't carry on, but we had to."

He is amused at the man that he's become. Once a hellraiser and firmly anti-establishment, these days he sports an OBE and spends time in the garden. "Getting the OBE was a huge honour. If I'm really honest, I don't feel people like us deserve it. I think the midwife in Leeds does but not us. But we maintain the profile of the honours system. No one really is going to ask the nurse or the milkman what they think – they don't get the media attention. The fact that Rick and I and various others in our business get them helps to raise the profile of the honours system."

> *My best friends in showbiz are people like Roy Wood and Jeff Lynne*

He's unsure what the future holds. There may be more records and more tours, though they may take time out in 2018 to reassess and consider where they're going. If they do tour again, the Black Country and Birmingham will be high on their list of places to visit.

"I've said this before but my best friends in showbusiness are people like Roy Wood, Jeff Lynne, Robert Plant and a truck driver whose name I'm not going to tell you – and they're all from your neck of the woods. Everybody I know from the area is fabulous, genuine. There's also a couple of rasta guys who do the NEC. I see them occasionally, any of those people I meet, it's like it was only yesterday that we saw each other. I might not see them for years, but I consider them friends. I feel comfortable around your lot."

● **For more entertainment news and reviews see The Ticket in your Express & Star every Friday.**

Steps – new music after 17 years

Steps into the future with new album and party tour

It's been 20 years since Steps released their disco-tastic debut – and now they're back to celebrate with a big pop party at Arena Birmingham tomorrow (Friday).

Lisa Scott-Lee and Claire Richards are trying to work out who the Chancellor of the Exchequer was when they formed, 20 years ago, in 1997. A giggling Ian 'H' Watkins, sat behind them, tickles them. Swatting him away, Claire correctly answers 'Gordon Brown' to the delight of her bandmates, who fall about laughing at H's antics.

It's just one sign of the affinity retained by the group, who split acrimoniously at the turn of the millennium, when Claire and H wanted to form a duo. Since then things have been patched up, and the band reformed in 2011 for a Sky Living series and a string of concerts.

Now, more than five years on, with the exception of 39-year-old Claire, they have all celebrated their 40th birthdays, but that does little to deter their energy.

The five, completed by Lee Latchford-Evans and Faye Tozer, are delighted at the success of their first album proper in 17 years, Tears On The Dancefloor, and single Scared Of The Dark. They listened to that song's first play on the radio together – almost 20 years to the day after they gathered to hear their debut, 5, 6, 7, 8.

"It felt like we had started all over again," reflects H. "New music the key for us to have a new energy with Steps," says Faye, "because we couldn't have asked the fans to come and see us again with just the old songs. I think it has breathed new life into us."

The Party On The Dancefloor tour also goes to the Genting Arena on December 9.

Strictly star Joanne is back in a flash

Flashdance The Musical returns to the UK for the first time since 2011, starring Strictly Come Dancing favourite Joanne Clifton and pop star Ben Adams, at Birmingham's New Alexandra Theatre from Tuesday to Saturday, December 9.

Strictly champion Joanne won both the main Strictly glitter ball, with Ore Oduba last year, and the Christmas Special in 2015 with Harry Judd.

Joanne made her musical theatre debut in Irving Berlin musical Face The Music, for which she was nominated for an award. She followed this up as Marilyn Monroe in the Norma Jeane The Musical and then trod the boards as Millie Dillmount in the UK Tour of Thoroughly Modern Millie.

Of her role as Alex Owens in the UK Tour of Flashdance, Joanne said: "This is just another dream come true. I think everyone in the world, whether dancer or non-dancer, as soon as they hear What a Feeling, remember that iconic scene at the end of the film and I'm so incredibly lucky that I get to do that every night in a UK tour. I can once again sing and act alongside dancing."

Ben who will join Joanne on stage as Nick Hurley, at 16 became the lead singer of the band a1, who racked up 10 million record sales, including two UK number ones. He is now a successful songwriter, producer and actor. He also reached the final of Celebrity Big Brother.

Of taking to the stage in Flashdance, he says: "It's amazing to be part of such an iconic story, and as an 80's child I was brought up on this music."

Flashdance The Musical is based on the hit movie and tells the story of Alex, a welder by day and 'flashdancer' by night, who will not give up on her dream of becoming a professional dancer.

Prankster Lee is a Serious Joker

The Prime Minister's least favourite comedian is at Dudley Town Hall tomorrow night (Friday). Prankster Lee Nelson caused a sensation at the Conservative Party Conference when he approached Theresa May during her speech and handed her a mock P45, claiming it was on behalf of Boris Johnson. Lee Nelson, real name Simon Brodkin, brings his Serious Joker tour to the Black Country, with his new suited and booted look after ditching the baseball cap and sportswear.

JAWS are ready to bite your Brum again

They impressed with their set at the Beyond The Tracks Festival earlier this year, and now Birmingham dream pop trio JAWS are giving home town fans another chance to see them live.

The former Halesowen College students are closing their tour with a set of swirling guitar rock at Digbeth's O2 Institute tomorrow (Friday), with Leeds indie outfit Marsicans and London band Social Contract.

JAWS are Connor Schofield on vocals and guitar, Alex Hudson on guitars and Eddy Geach on drums. A year ago they released their second album Simplicity, the follow up to 2014 debut Be Slowly.

Also tomorrow, The Charlatans are at Wolverhampton Civic Hall while Good Charlotte play the O2 Academy. Then the Academy hosts Scouting For Girls on Saturday, with Gorillaz at the Birmingham Arena.

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SATURDAY'S TV DECEMBER 2

CHOICE

Simon Cowell

The X Factor: Live Final (ITV, 7.05pm)
Once upon a time, the winner of The X Factor was almost guaranteed a Christmas No.1 single. Those days are now gone, but that's not to say there isn't a lot riding on this weekend's final of the singing contest. After weeks of lively auditions, gruelling boot camps, six-chair challenges and tense on-stage showdowns, the winner will be announced tomorrow. But before that, the three remaining wannabes take to the stage again here, with judges Simon Cowell, Louis Walsh, Nicole Scherzinger and Sharon Osbourne delivering their verdict. The act with the lowest public-vote figures then faces the heart-breaking prospect of finishing in third place, while the remaining two go on to battle it out.

BBC1

6.00 Breakfast. **10.00** Saturday Kitchen Live. **11.30** Nigella: At My Table. (R) **12.00** Football Focus. **1.00** BBC News; Weather. **1.15** Live Snooker: UK Championship. Coverage of the fourth day at the Barbican Centre in York. **2.00** Live International Rugby Union. Wales v South Africa (Kick-off 2.30pm). **4.30** Final Score. **5.25** Len Goodman's Partners in Rhyme. **5.55** BBC News.

6.05 Regional Programme.

6.15 Pointless Celebrities. Sophie Ellis-Bextor, Brendan Cole, Chris Hollins, Russell Grant, Aliona Vilani, Jay McGuiness, Anton du Beke and Erin Boag compete in a "Strictly Come Dancing" edition of the quiz. (R)

7.05 Strictly Come Dancing. Only six couples remain in the running, as Tess Daly and Claudia Winkleman invite the pro-celebrity duos back to the studio for another round of performances. This time, it is Musicals Week, which means the stars and their professional dancer partners will be tackling popular routines from West End and Broadway shows. The show begins with a group performance taking the form of a routine from the soundtrack of Oliver!, before their stars are tasked with pulling off their individual dances. Judges Shirley Ballas, Darcey Bussell, Bruno Tonioli and Craig Revel Horwood are on hand to deliver their verdicts and award points to the most successful stars. However, the competitors' true fate will only be decided once the public has voted.

8.10 Michael McIntyre's Big Show. Jessie J and Stereophonics perform on-stage at London's Theatre Royal, and football pundit Alan Shearer hands over his phone for Celebrity Send to All.

9.10 Casualty. Connie puts her health at risk by maintaining a presence on the ED, Ethan shows up late for his practical consultancy exam, and Max takes a shine to new coffee shop worker Polly.

10.00 BBC News; Weather.; National Lottery Update.

10.20 Match of the Day. Gary Lineker presents action from the latest Premier League matches.

11.50 The NFL Show.

12.20 Film: Lay the Favorite. (2012) **1.50** Weather for the Week Ahead. **1.55** BBC News.

BBC2

6.15 Holiday of My Lifetime with Len Goodman. (R) **7.00** Naomi's Nightmares of Nature. **7.30** Deadly 60. (R) **8.00** Show Me What You're Made Of: UK. **8.30** Live Rugby League World Cup. **11.30** Homes Under the Hammer. (R) **12.00** Raymond Blanc: How to Cook Well. (R) **12.30** Operation Snow Tiger. (R) **1.30** Mastermind. (R) **2.00** Live Snooker: UK Championship.

6.00 Rugby League World Cup. Tanya Arnold introduces highlights of the final at Brisbane Stadium, where the successors to Australia were decided after 28 matches spanning the last five weeks.

7.00 Front Row. Brenda Emmanus and a selection of critics and artists discuss the state of contemporary art in Britain, as part of a special edition focusing on this year's Turner Prize shortlist.

7.30 Galapagos – Islands of Change: Natural World. David Attenborough narrates a documentary that looks at the impact increased migration and tourism has had on the Pacific archipelago's wildlife. (R)

8.30 Dad's Army. Captain Mainwaring lets Frazer take charge of the platoon, gambling that a taste of authority will give him a more responsible attitude. (R)

9.00 Imagine – Rachel Whiteread: Ghost in the Room. A profile of Rachel Whiteread, from the controversy surrounding her 1993 Turner Prize-winning piece House, to the acclaim she achieved for creating Vienna's Holocaust Memorial.

10.05 QI XL. Romesh Ranganathan, Matt Lucas and Liza Tarbuck join regular panellist Alan Davies and host Sandi Toksvig for an extended edition of the quiz show.

10.50 Insert Name Here. Hugh Dennis, Suzannah Lipscomb, Rebecca Front and Phil Wang join captains Richard Osman and Josh Widdicombe to answer questions about famous people who share a name. (R)

11.20 Snooker: UK Championship. The second round at the Barbican Centre in York, where the matches were played over the best of 11 frames, in the prestigious ranking tournament. Hazel Irvine presents.

12.10 Snooker: UK Championship Extra. **2.10 Film:** Ratcatcher. (1999) **3.40** This Is BBC Two.

ITV

6.00 CITV: Sooty. **6.10** Bottom Knocker Street. (R) **6.20** Bottom Knocker Street. (R) **6.35** Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. (R) **6.45** Super 4. (R) **7.00** Mission Employable. (R) **7.05** Oddbods. (R) **7.10** Ultimate Spider-Man: Web Warriors. **7.30** Scrambled!: Scrambled! **7.35** Scrambled!: The Tom and Jerry Show. (R) **7.50** Scrambled!: Fangbone. (R) **8.10** Scrambled!: The Powerpuff Girls. (R) **8.30** Scrambled!: Thunderbirds Are Go. **9.00** Scrambled!: Wishfart. (R) **9.25** ITV News. **9.30** Saturday Morning with James Martin. **11.25** Gino's Italian Coastal Escape. (R) **11.55** ITV News; Weather. **12.00** The X Factor: The Semi Finals. (R) **1.30** ITV Racing: Live from Newbury. Coverage of the second day of the winter carnival at Newbury. **4.00** Thunderbirds Are Go. (R) **4.25** The Cruise: Sailing the Mediterranean. (R) **5.00** Paul O'Grady: For the Love of Dogs. (R) **5.25** New You've Been Framed! **5.55** Regional Programme ; Weather.

6.00 ITV News; Weather.

6.10 Ninja Warrior UK. The semi-finals arrive, and Ben Shephard, Rochelle Humes and Chris Kamara challenge the contestants who survived the heats to test their endurance on the obstacle course once again. (R)

7.05 The X Factor: Live Final. Dermot O'Leary presents the first of two live grand finals, as the remaining singers compete for approval again, and one act faces the prospect of bowing out in third place.

9.10 I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here! Ant and Dec present the celebrity challenge, as the famous faces continue their ordeal in the Australian jungle.

10.15 ITV News; Weather.

10.35 Film: Rambo III. (1988) Vietnam veteran John Rambo turns down a request from his old colonel to join a mission in Soviet-occupied Afghanistan. However, when the officer is captured, Rambo sets off to save him, joining the Mujahedeen rebels in fighting against the Russian invaders. Action adventure sequel, starring Sylvester Stallone, Richard Crenna, Kurtwood Smith, Marc de Jonge and Sasson Gabai.

12.25 Jackpot247. Viewers get the chance to participate in live interactive gaming from the comfort of their sofas. **3.00** The Hungry Sailors. (R) **3.50** ITV Nightscreen.

CHANNEL 4

6.20 Adventure Racing: 4 Deserts. **6.45** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **7.10** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **7.40** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **8.05** Frasier. (R) **8.35** Frasier. (R) **9.05** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **9.35** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **10.00** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **10.25** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **10.55** The Simpsons. (R) **11.25** The Simpsons. (R) **11.55** Come Dine with Me. (R) **12.25** Come Dine with Me. (R) **12.55** Come Dine with Me. (R) **1.30** Come Dine with Me. (R) **2.00** Come Dine with Me. (R) **2.35** A Place in the Sun: Home or Away. (R) **3.35** A Place in the Sun: Home or Away. (R) **4.35** Best Laid Plans. **5.35** Grand Designs. (R)

6.30 Channel 4 News.

7.00 Can We Live with Robots? Dancer and choreographer Akram Khan explores the impact robots and AI are having on human relationships. Khan, who has spent a year researching important international news and condensing it into dance, travels from the UK to Japan and the USA to meet the scientists harnessing manufactured intelligence in ways that could see artificially intelligent constructs entering people's lives in the near future. His findings form the basis for a special dance, in which he hopes to reflect fears and scepticism over the subject.

8.00 Film: The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel. (2011) Seven English pensioners looking for a fresh start are drawn to an advert for a hotel in the Indian city of Jaipur, and plan to spend their retirement there. They arrive to find the building dilapidated but are won over by the enthusiastic young manager, and each embarks on their own adventures in the city. Comedy drama, starring Judi Dench, Bill Nighy, Maggie Smith and Dev Patel.

10.25 Film: I, Robot. (2004) A detective is convinced a robot has killed its creator, even though it has been programmed never to harm humans. Sci-fi thriller, with Will Smith, Bridget Moynahan and Alan Tudyk.

12.40 Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA. (R) **1.30** The Last Leg. Matt Lucas and Rebecca Front join the regulars. (R) **2.25** Hollyoaks. Omnibus. Marnie is concerned about Mac. **4.30** Location, Location, Location. (R) **5.25** Draw It! (R) **5.55** Kevin Can Wait.

CHANNEL 5

6.00 Milkshake! **9.00** FIA Formula E. **10.45** The Gadget Show. (R) **11.45** Cruising With Jane McDonald. **12.10 Film:** A Christmas to Remember. (2016) Festive romance, starring Mira Sorvino and Cameron Mathison. **1.50 Film:** Merry Kissmas! (2015) Romance, starring Karissa Staples and Brant Daugherty. **3.35 Film:** Annie Claus Is Coming to Town. (2011) Christmas fantasy, starring Maria Thayer. **4.35** 5 News Update. **4.45 Film:** Annie Claus Is Coming to Town. (2011) Concluded. **5.25 Film:** A Dream of Christmas. (2016) Premiere. Festive romance, starring Nikki DeLoach.

6.25 5 News Update.

6.30 Film: A Dream of Christmas. (2016) Concluded.

7.10 Can't Pay? We'll Take It Away. Agents in central London try to recover almost £1,900 owed in parking fines, while officers Stewart and Vic chase over £2,200 owed by a scrap yard owner to a shipping company. Finally, Stewart and Vic head to Merseyside to recover over £3,500 owed by a publishing company to an unhappy ex-employee. (R)

8.05 NCIS: New Orleans. A US Marine corporal with a passion for amateur race-car driving suffers a fatal crash while on the track, and as the agents investigate, they begin to suspect the collision might not have been as accidental as it first seemed.

8.55 5 News Weekend.

9.00 Football on 5: The Championship. Colin Murray introduces highlights from the weekend's games, including Derby County v Burton Albion from Pride Park, Sunderland v Reading from The Stadium of Light, and Bristol City v Middlesbrough from Ashton Gate.

10.00 Live Boxing. Anthony Yigit v Joe Hughes. Coverage of the bout for the European Super-Lightweight title, which takes place at Leicester Arena.

12.00 SuperCasino. Viewers get the chance to take part in live interactive gaming, with a mix of roulette-wheel spins and lively chat from the presenting team. **3.10** When Calls the Heart. Jack is reassigned. (R) **4.40** Access. Showbiz news and gossip. (R) **4.55** House Doctor. Transforming a dingy Cheltenham house. (R) **5.20** Wildlife SOS. The work of an animal sanctuary. (R) **5.45** Chinese Food in Minutes. Two nurses learn to cook traditional oriental dishes. (R)

DIGITAL

BBC Four

7.00 Ancient Egypt: Life and Death in the Valley of the Kings **8.00** The Mekong River with Sue Perkins **9.00** Witnesses: A Frozen Death **10.45** The Vietnam War **11.40** What a Performance! Pioneers of Popular Entertainment **12.40** Burt Bacharach: A Life in Song **2.10** The Mekong River with Sue Perkins **3.10** Close

ITV2

12.45 Take Me Out **1.45 Film:** The Lake House (2006) **2.45** FYI Daily **2.50 Film:** The Lake House (2006) **3.50** You've Been Framed! at Christmas **4.50** I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here! **6.15 Film:** Evan Almighty (2007) **7.15** FYI Daily **7.20 Film:** Evan Almighty (2007) **8.10 Film:** Wrath of the Titans (2012) **9.10** FYI Daily **9.15 Film:** Wrath of the Titans (2012) **10.15** I'm a Celebrity: Extra Camp **11.15** Family Guy **12.45** American Dad! **1.40** Release the Hounds **2.35** Totally Bonkers Guinness World Records **3.00** Teleshopping

ITV3

11.00 Film: Columbo: How to Dial a Murder (1978) **12.40** Agatha Christie's Marple **2.45 Film:** Santa Claus: The Movie (1985) **3.50** FYI Daily **3.55 Film:** Santa Claus: The Movie (1985) **5.00** Midsomer Murders **1.10** Wycliffe **2.05** ITV3 Nightscreen **2.30** Teleshopping

ITV4

2.55 Storage Wars: Best of the Appraisals **3.25 Film:** Superman (1978) **4.25** FYI Daily **4.30 Film:** Superman (1978) **6.20 Film:** Nacho Libre (2006) **7.20** FYI Daily **7.25 Film:** Nacho Libre (2006) **8.10 Film:** The Nutty Professor (1996) **9.10** FYI Daily **9.15 Film:** The Nutty Professor (1996) **10.00 Film:** 16 Blocks (2006) **11.00** FYI Daily **11.05 Film:** 16 Blocks (2006) **12.05 Film:** Senna (2010) **1.05** FYI Daily **1.10 Film:** Senna (2010) **2.20** River Monsters **2.45** ITV4 Nightscreen **3.00** Teleshopping

E4

11.00 The Goldbergs **12.00 Film:** Diary of a Wimpy Kid (2010) **1.55** Rude(ish) Tube Shorts **2.00** The Goldbergs **4.30** The Big Bang Theory **9.00 Film:** A Good Day to Die Hard (2013) **11.00** Gogglebox **1.05** Tattoo Fixers **2.05** Rude Tube **3.05** Gogglebox **3.55** Rude Tube **4.20** Rules of Engagement

Film4

1.00 The Muppet Christmas Carol (1992) **2.45** Letters to Juliet (2010) **4.50** Miracle on 34th Street (1947) **6.55** The Tourist (2010) **9.00** Solace (2015) **11.05** The Mortal Instruments: City of Bones (2013) **1.40** Hercules (1983) **3.50** Close

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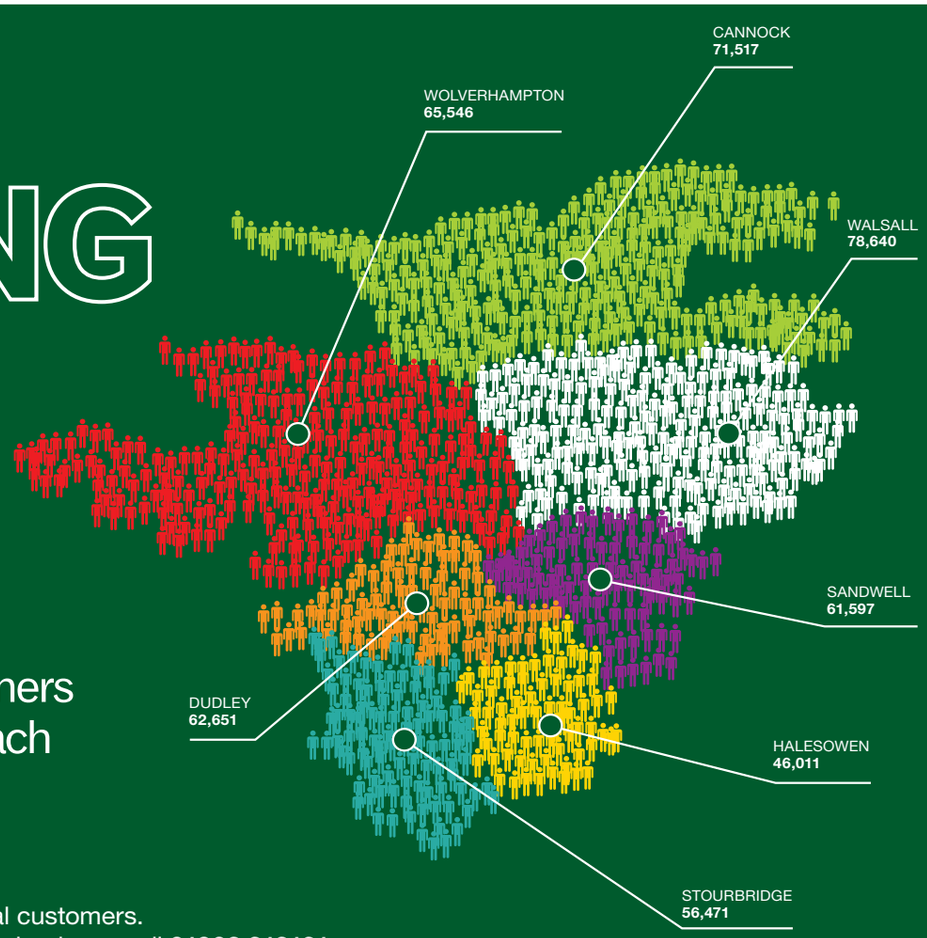

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SUNDAY'S TV DECEMBER 3

CHOICE

Julie Walters

Coastal Railways with Julie Walters
(Channel 4, 8pm)
The actress and national treasure's second journey takes her from Newcastle upon Tyne to Edinburgh by high-speed train. Along the way, she stops off at the picturesque coastal village of Alnmouth, nicknamed the Tobermory of Northumberland. Here, Julie discovers where the phrase Keep Calm and Carry On originated, at a bookshop in the village, before visiting the world's biggest gannet colony – Bass Rock in the Firth of Forth. Next, she goes out to sea with a lobster breeder, and when she reaches her final destination, the Scottish capital, she discovers the connection between the railway and the world-famous Balmoral Hotel.

BBC1

6.00 Breakfast. **7.25** Match of the Day. (R) **9.00** The Andrew Marr Show. **10.00** Fern Britton Meets Stefanie Reid. **11.00** Regional Programme. **12.15** BBC News; Weather. **12.30** Flog It! (R) **12.50** Mary Berry's Country House Secrets. (R) **1.50** FA Cup Final Score. **4.15** Songs of Praise. **4.55** Blue Planet II. (R) **5.55** BBC News.

6.10 Regional Programme.

6.20 Countryfile. Helen Skelton and Sean Fletcher explore the Cleveland Way. Helen meets a group of marathon runners and a scout team who have taken responsibility for a stretch of the area, while Sean finds out about a local oral history project and joins a wildlife photographer documenting leaping salmon. Plus, Tom Heap reports on the impact of climate change and Adam Henson finds out how to become a farmer without owning a farm.

7.20 Strictly Come Dancing: The Results. Tess Daly and Claudia Winkleman reveal the results of the Musicals Week viewers' vote. Featuring music from Beverley Knight, Amber Riley and Cassidy Janson.

8.00 Blue Planet II. Footage of animals that live on the coast, including sea lions working in packs to hunt tuna in the shallows and moray eels that venture out of the water to seek out food on dry rocks. Puffins must brave predators to bring a mouthful of food back to their young and king penguins go without food for a month while they moult. Plus, footage of the bizarre Leaping Blenny, a fish that hates the water.

9.00 Howards End. Margaret resolves to uphold her engagement, while Helen leaves for Europe with no explanation. Henry proposes a plan to resolve the issues at Howards End. Last in the series.

10.00 BBC News.

10.20 Regional Programme.

10.30 Match of the Day 2. Mark Chapman reviews the latest Premier League action, featuring Manchester City v West Ham United at the Etihad Stadium and Bournemouth v Southampton at the Vitality Stadium.

11.30 Ronny Chieng: International Student.

11.55 Weather for the Week Ahead.

12.00 BBC News.

BBC2

7.05 Gardeners' World. (R) **7.35** The Secret History of the British Garden. (R) **8.35** Countryfile. (R) **9.30** Saturday Kitchen Best Bites. **11.00** Food & Drink. (R) **11.30** My Life on a Plate. (R) **12.15** MOTD2 Extra. **1.00** Live Snooker: UK Championship. Coverage of the fifth day at the Barbican Centre in York.

6.00 MOTD: FA Cup Highlights. Manish Bhasin introduces action from the second round, as the remaining 40 lower league and non-league sides looked to move a step closer to a potentially lucrative and glamourous tie in the third round.

7.00 Turkey with Simon Reeve. In the second half of the journey, Simon travels along the Black Sea Coast to the capital of Ankara and the Northern Highlands, witnessing first hand the aftermath of fighting in Kurdish areas and meeting a conservationist attempting to preserve the region's brown bears. He then returns to Istanbul, where he takes part in a popular TV series set in the palace of the Ottoman Sultans. (R)

8.00 Robot Wars. Dara Ó Briain and Angela Scanlon present the grand final, which features the biggest ever Robot Wars battle. One of the six places in the last round remains free, and to decide who gets it, all the contestants who came second or third in the past five episodes return to battle to the death. The winner in this Ten Robot Rumble will have to face the five episode winners through a series of group battles and knockout rounds before the final showdown to decide which machine will be crowned series champion. Last in the series.

9.00 Expedition Volcano. Part two of two. The team takes a helicopter to the crater of an active volcano that is surrounded by forests which provide cover for a number of armed militant groups.

10.00 Snowfall. Franklin discovers that it was Lenny who came after him, and is forced to fight back or lose everything. Lucia is powerless to stop Ramiro taking over everything she has created.

10.45 Snowfall. Franklin finds success comes at a price. Last in the series.

11.40 Snooker: UK Championship.

12.30 Snooker: UK Championship Extra. **2.30** Sign Zone: Question Time. (R) **3.30** Holby City. (R) **4.30** This Is BBC Two.

ITV

6.00 CITV: Sooty. **6.10** Bottom Knocker Street. (R) **6.20** Bottom Knocker Street. (R) **6.35** Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. (R) **6.45** Super 4. (R) **7.00** Mission Employable. (R) **7.05** Oddbods. (R) **7.10** Thunderbirds Are Go. (R) **7.30** Scrambled!: Scrambled! **7.35** Scrambled!: The Tom and Jerry Show. (R) **7.50** Scrambled!: Ben 10. **8.10** Scrambled!: Mr Bean: The Animated Series. (R) **8.30** Scrambled!: Make It Pop. **9.00** Scrambled!: Wishfart. (R) **9.25** ITV News. **9.30** Australian Wilderness with Ray Mears. (R) **10.00** Peston on Sunday. **10.55** The Martin Lewis Money Show. (R) **11.25** Save Money: Good Food. (R) **12.00** Tipping Point. (R) **1.00** ITV News; Weather. **1.05** The X Factor: Live Final. (R) **3.10** Midsomer Murders. (R) **5.05** How to Spend It Well at Christmas with Phillip Schofield. (R)

6.05 Regional Programme; Weather.

6.15 ITV News; Weather.

6.30 The Chase Celebrity Special. Gregg Wallace, Denise Lewis, Mark Pougatch and Gina Yashere answer general knowledge questions and work as a team to secure a cash prize for charity. Presented by Bradley Walsh.

7.25 The X Factor: Live Final. Dermot O'Leary introduces the climax of this year's talent contest. The results of last night's performance at Wembley Arena are in and one of the three finalists has been eliminated from the contest. The two remaining acts must give one final performance to impress the viewing public and the judges, before one of them is crowned as this year's winner. Last in the series.

9.00 I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here! Ant and Dec present the celebrity challenge, as the famous faces continue their ordeal in the Australian jungle.

10.30 ITV News; Weather.

10.45 Peston on Sunday. Political magazine, presented by Robert Peston and Allegra Stratton. Last in the series. (R)

11.45 Car Crash Britain: Caught on Camera. Road accidents and near-misses, including a woman who had a close shave when a car ploughed into her office, parallel parking calamities and a new driver with no beginners' luck. (R)

12.35 Jackpot247. **3.00** Motorsport UK. **3.50** ITV Nightscreen.

CHANNEL 4

6.20 Kevin Can Wait. **6.45** Kevin Can Wait. **7.10** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **7.35** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **8.00** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **8.30** Frasier. (R) **9.00** Frasier. (R) **9.30** Sunday Brunch. **12.30** Paul Hollywood: A Baker's Life. (R) **1.00** F1 2017: Hamilton's Record Breaking Season. **2.00** The Simpsons. (R) **2.30** The Simpsons. (R) **2.55** The Simpsons. (R) **3.25** The Simpsons. (R) **3.55 Film:** Arthur Christmas. (2011) Animated comedy, with the voice of James McAvoy. **5.50 Film:** Shrek. (2001) Animated comedy, with the voice of Mike Myers.

7.30 Channel 4 News.

8.00 Coastal Railways with Julie Walters. The actress travels from Newcastle to Edinburgh by high speed train. Along the way, she stops off at the coastal town of Alnmouth, discovers where the phrase Keep Calm and Carry On originated, visits the world's biggest gannet colony, and goes out to sea with a lobster breeder. When she reaches her destination, she discovers the connection between the railway and the famous Balmoral Hotel.

9.00 Film: Mission: Impossible – Ghost Protocol. (2011) Secret agent Ethan Hunt and his team are implicated in a bombing at the Kremlin, forcing the American president to declare them fugitives. The spies plan to clear their name by abducting the real terrorist, which leads them into a pursuit around the globe. However, Hunt cannot be sure his colleagues are trustworthy. Action adventure sequel, starring Tom Cruise, Jeremy Renner, Simon Pegg and Paula Patton.

11.35 Film: I, Frankenstein. (2014) The scientist's monster is caught up in a war between supernatural beings who want the secret of his immortality. Fantasy adventure, with Aaron Eckhart and Bill Nighy.

1.15 Film: Morning Glory. (2010) Comedy, starring Rachel McAdams. **3.00** Trump: An American Dream. A new wife, a hit TV show and the ultimate prize in world politics. Last in the series. (R) **3.55** Gillette World Sport. Including a profile of fixed-gear cyclist Patrick Seabase. **4.25** KOTV Boxing Weekly. **4.50** Mobil 1 The Grid. (R) **5.20** Kirstie's Handmade Treasures. (R) **5.35** Countdown. With Richard Madeley in Dictionary Corner. (R)

CHANNEL 5

6.00 Milkshake!: Little Princess. **6.10** Wanda and the Alien. (R) **6.20** Poppy Cat. (R) **6.35** Wissper. (R) **6.40** Milkshake! Monkey. (R) **6.45** Milkshake! Bopping About. (R) **6.50** Simon. (R) **6.55** Peppa Pig. (R) **7.00** Paw Patrol. (R) **7.15** Digby Dragon. **7.30** Fireman Sam. (R) **7.45** Olly the Little White Van. (R) **7.55** Paw Patrol. (R) **8.10** Noddy: Toyland Detective. (R) **8.25** Shimmer and Shine. (R) **8.40** Peppa Pig. (R) **8.50** Peppa Pig. (R) **8.55** FIA Formula E. **10.40** Football on 5: The Championship. (R) **11.25 Film:** Finding Father Christmas. (2016) **1.10 Film:** The Christmas Secret. (2014) Drama, starring Bethany Joy Lenz. **2.55 Film:** On the 12th Day of Christmas. (2015) Premiere. Romantic drama, starring Brooke Nevin and Robin Dunne. **3.55** 5 News Update. **4.00 Film:** On the 12th Day of Christmas. (2015) Concluded. **4.45 Film:** Northpole: Open for Christmas. (2015) Premiere. Festive fantasy sequel, starring Bailee Madison. **5.45** 5 News Update. **5.50 Film:** Northpole: Open for Christmas. (2015) Concluded.

6.30 Film: Call Me Claus. (2001) A cynical female TV producer hires a man to play Santa Claus in a programme. He turns out to be the real Father Christmas, and has come on a special mission to melt her icy heart and persuade her to take over the reindeer reins as the new face of the festive season. Family drama, starring Whoopi Goldberg, Nigel Hawthorne, Brian Mitchell and Victor Garber.

8.15 Aviva Premiership Rugby Highlights. Mark Durden-Smith and David Flatman present action from the 10th round of matches, including Northampton Saints v Newcastle Falcons, Exeter Chiefs v Bath, and Harlequins v Saracens.

8.55 5 News Weekend.

9.00 The Paul O'Grady Story. Profile of the talk show host, exploring his formative years as a social worker and showbiz career appearing as both himself and his drag act alter ego Lily Savage. (R)

10.35 When Reality TV Goes Horribly Wrong. Vicky Pattison narrates a countdown of disastrous incidents on reality shows, featuring Nikki Grahame, Bianca Gascoigne, Paul Danan and Jessie Cave.

1.30 Lip Sync Battle UK: Carol Vorderman v Martin Kemp. (R) **1.55** SuperCasino. **3.10** Bargain-Loving Brits in Blackpool. (R)

DIGITAL

BBC Four
7.00 Great Continental Railway Journeys **7.30** University Challenge **8.00** Classic Quartets at the BBC **9.00** Natural World **10.40** Britain's Wild Places **11.00 Film:** Taxi Tehran (2015) **12.20** Classic Quartets at the BBC **1.20** Natural World **3.00** Close

ITV2
11.25 Take Me Out **12.40** You've Been Framed! at Christmas **1.10** Merry Christmas Mr Bean **1.45** The Smurfs: A Christmas Carol **2.15 Film:** Beethoven's Christmas Adventure (2011) **3.15** FYI Daily **3.20 Film:** Beethoven's Christmas Adventure (2011) **4.05** I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here! **5.10 Film:** Nanny McPhee and the Big Bang (2010) **6.15** FYI Daily **6.20 Film:** Nanny McPhee and the Big Bang (2010) **7.20 Film:** The Amazing Spider-Man (2012) **8.20** FYI Daily **8.25 Film:** The Amazing Spider-Man (2012) **10.00** Family Guy **10.30** I'm a Celebrity: Extra Camp **11.35** Family Guy **12.30** American Dad! **1.30** Release the Hounds **2.25** Teleshopping **5.55** ITV2 Nightscreen

ITV3
11.30 FYI Daily **11.35 Film:** Santa Claus: The Movie (1985) **12.40 Film:** Columbo: Death Hits the Jackpot (1991) **2.45** Agatha Christie's Marple **4.50** Midsomer Murders **9.00** Endeavour **11.00** Lewis **1.00** The Knock **3.00** Sherlock Holmes: The Sign of Four **4.50** Judge Judy **5.30** ITV3 Nightscreen

ITV4
11.30 Film: Superman (1978) **12.30** FYI Daily **12.35 Film:** Superman (1978) **2.25 Film:** The Dam Busters (1954) **3.25** FYI Daily **3.30 Film:** The Dam Busters (1954) **5.00** British Touring Car Championship Highlights **7.05 Film:** Nacho Libre (2006) **8.05** FYI Daily **8.10 Film:** Nacho Libre (2006) **9.00 Film:** The Dictator (2012) **10.00** FYI Daily **10.05 Film:** The Dictator (2012) **10.40 Film:** Hot Tub Time Machine 2 (2015) **11.40** FYI Daily **11.45 Film:** Hot Tub Time Machine 2 (2015) **12.30 Film:** Mars Attacks! (1996) **1.30** FYI Daily **1.35 Film:** Mars Attacks! (1996) **2.40** ITV4 Nightscreen **3.00** Teleshopping

E4
11.00 Made in Chelsea **12.00** Don't Tell the Bride **1.00 Film:** Marmaduke (2010) **2.45** Rude(ish) Tube Shorts **3.00** The Goldbergs **4.30** The Big Bang Theory **9.00 Film:** Ted (2012) **11.05** The Big Bang Theory **12.05** Gogglebox **1.05** Rude Tube **2.10** First Dates **3.05** Rude Tube **3.35** Hollyoaks

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PICK OF THE WEEK

FILM CHOICES

MONDAY
The Christmas Calendar, Channel 5, 3.45pm
Emily has just taken over her grandmother's failing bakery and discovers that if she doesn't attract enough customers by Christmas, she will lose it. Finding new customers proves tough, but when she receives a handmade Advent calendar from a secret admirer, the local residents become obsessed with finding out the identity of the sender. Festive romantic drama, starring Laura Bell Bundy. (2017)

TUESDAY
Call Me Claus, Channel 5, 3.40pm
A cynical female TV producer hires a man to play Santa Claus in a programme. He turns out to be the real Father Christmas, and has come on a special mission to melt her icy heart and persuade her to take over the reindeer reins as the new face of the festive season. Family drama, starring Whoopi Goldberg, Nigel Hawthorne and Victor Garber. (2001)

Brick Mansions, Thursday, Channel 5, 9pm

WEDNESDAY
Spirit of Christmas, Channel 2, 2pm
When brokering the sale of a haunted inn, a lawyer meets a charming ghost who lives there, and she ends up agreeing to help him discover the truth behind his death. Romantic drama, starring Jen Lilley and Thomas Beaudoin. (2015)

THURSDAY
Brick Mansions, Channel 5, 9pm
A ghetto of Detroit is walled off from the rest of the city to contain its criminal population. A cop out for revenge and an ex-convict trying to save his kidnapped girlfriend are forced to team up to stop a drug kingpin carrying out a plan that could destroy the entire city. US remake of French action adventure District 13, starring Paul Walker. (2014)

FRIDAY
Christmas Under Wraps, Channel 5, 3.45pm
When a doctor fails to get the position she wanted, she ends up moving to a remote Alaskan town and unexpectedly ends up finding love and happiness, and discovers that the small town is hiding a big holiday secret. Drama, starring Candace Cameron Bure, David O'Donnell and Robert Pine. (2014)

Kirstie gets in the festive spirit in new one-off show

What started out as a pleasant diversion is turning into a national institution.

In 2009, Kirstie Allsopp – who was previously best known for her property expertise thanks to the show Location Location Location – fronted Kirstie's Handmade Home, in which she decorated her new Devon house with craft items she made herself.

The format has since widened to encompass Kirstie's Handmade Britain, Kirstie's Vintage Home, Fill Your House for Free, and several other shows, including this now annual festive series.

In the meantime, Allsopp is also the face of The Handmade Fair, which takes place every September at Hampton Court, and offers visitors an opportunity to meet makers and buy the materials needed to produce their own crafty products.

It's certainly a far cry from selling properties. In the years since her first dabble into the world of the handmade, crafts have really risen in popularity, with thousands across the country taking up knitting, crochet, sewing, baking, woodwork and more.

Did Allsopp's show and others along similar lines inspire folk, or did they reflect an already growing trend that began as the public attempted to find ways to save money in an uncertain economic climate? That's a topic still up for discussion, but whatever the answer, it seems that for the foreseeable future, crafts are here to stay.

For Allsopp, taking part in the programmes has turned a casual interest into a passion.

"I think it's always interested me, but I never thought I was capable of doing it," she says of the crafting world. "So I would buy it. I'd see something that was made with love and care, and I would purchase it. I never really thought I was capable of that.

"I was a very early advocate of the immaculate Christmas, making a big effort with that kind of stuff. But it was a surprising discovery for me that I was capable of making things myself."

However, she does admit defeat in some areas, but thinks that a fear of failure shouldn't put people off trying new things.

"The ones that I can't get good at involve knitting, crocheting, cross-stitching - I just can't feel my way towards them," she admits. "But a lot of the crafts are made much, much more difficult on the show by the time aspect, and by having the cameras there.

"There are times when you see me throwing a wobbly, but the truth is, I'm throwing a wobbly at the process of being filmed while under this kind of pressure. That is what gets to you - because you are doing this flower arrangement, for example, and someone will say 'Kirstie, can you talk about what you're feeling now?'"

Hopefully no wobblers will be thrown in the first of the latest run, which sees Allsopp get the ball rolling with a detailed handmade fairy and delicate diorama baubles.

Kirstie's Handmade Christmas, Tuesday, Channel 4, 8pm

BEST OF THE REST

MONDAY
The Real Marigold on Tour
BBC1, 9pm
The familiar faces are back, but this time they're not heading for India – instead, they're hitting the road for a variety of geriatric adventures. Each destination will be visited by a different group, but they all have two things in common - to learn how countries across the globe treat their pensioners, and to find out if they could live there themselves. It's a four-part run that begins when Miriam Margolyes, Wayne Sleep, Bobby George and Rosemary Shrager travel to Chengdu, the capital of China's Sichuan Province. More than 14 million people live there, and the population is ageing fast. It isn't Miriam's first trip to the country, but she struggles with the food while all of the travellers find the language barrier rather difficult to surmount.

TUESDAY
Extraordinary Teens: My Gay Life
Channel 4, 10pm
There are shades of Richard Linklater's acclaimed, Oscar-winning drama Boyhood to this documentary – except this film charts real events in the life of the child we are watching grow up before our very eyes. The project began in 2011, when cameras first captured a then 11-year-old boy called Billy. Over the course of five years, the film-makers followed the youngster, charting his teenage life. The result is a portrait not just of one boy, but of childhood, adolescence and family.

WEDNESDAY
Mary Berry's Country House Secrets
BBC1, 8pm
Mary visits Powderham Castle in Devon to spend time with the Earl and Countess of Devon and their two young children, who are reinventing the Earldom for the 21st century. Mary's time with the family reveals stories of romance and tragedy as she discovers more of this extraordinary home. In the castle's historic kitchen, Mary prepares a Devon cream tea, before making a delicate peach posset for a Midsummer Eve woodland party the family are throwing to celebrate their two year anniversary at the castle.

THURSDAY
Great Canal Journeys
Channel 4, 8pm
Timothy West and Prunella Scales return to Wales to explore a canal that has eluded them for more than half a century. The Monmouthshire and Brecon canal is cut off from the rest of Britain's network of waterways by the Black Mountains, and meanders its way through the tranquil Usk valley. Along the way the couple visit the old ironworks at Blaenavon, where children as young as five were once put to work, and lend a hand with some lock restoration work. They also explore the 15th-century castle at Tretower - which is rumoured to be haunted.

The Real Marigold on Tour, Monday, BBC1, 9pm

FRIDAY
Brunel: The Man Who Built Britain
Channel 5, 8pm
Victorian visionary Isambard Kingdom Brunel is still regarded as one of Britain's greatest ever engineers – which is probably just the way he'd like it. In this two-part documentary, Rob Bell takes closer look at both Brunel's extraordinary achievements and the complex personality that drove them, and discovers that he was obsessed with public acclaim. He would also stop at nothing to bring his projects to fruition – as well as risking his own life, hundreds of people were killed while working for him. In the first episode, Rob examines Brunel's first major project, the Thames Tunnel, which is still in use today as part of the London Overground rail. Construction began in 1825, under the direction of Brunel's father Marc, while Isambard was appointed chief engineer at the age of just 19.

The Year in Music 2017
BBC2, 9pm
Last year, most of the music retrospectives seemed to focus on the big names we'd lost in 2016, including David Bowie, Prince and Leonard Cohen. But hopefully, this end-of-the-year round-up will prove to be a more celebratory affair as Claudia Winkleman and Clara Amfo look back at the musical highlights from the past 12 months, including the best albums, the biggest artists and some of the most unforgettable performances. Among the stars offering their take on 2017 are the Foo Fighters, Liam Gallagher, Stormzy, Nile Rodgers, Dua Lipa, Nick Grimshaw, Mistajam, and Jo Whiley, while Rag ën' Bone Man obliges with an exclusive performance. And just to confirm who's had a good year, the winners of the 2017 BBC Music Awards will be announced.

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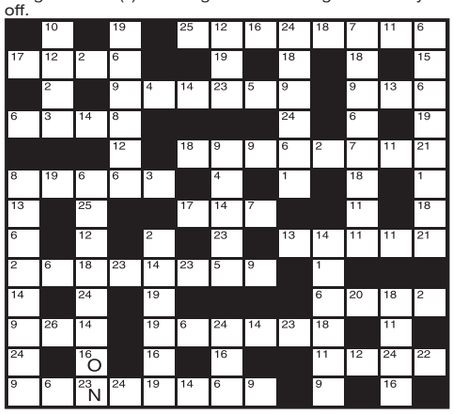
No.458

Codeword

Each number in the grid represents a different letter of the alphabet and every letter of the alphabet is used. Use the given letter(s) to the right of the main grid to start you off.



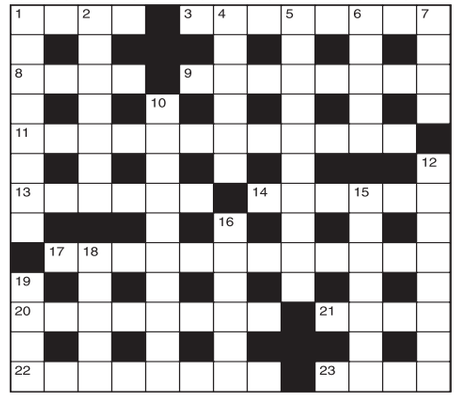
1	14
2	15
3	16 O
4	17
5	18
6	19
7	20
8	21
9	22
10	23 N
11	24
12	25
13	26

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
O	A	J	B	P	M	D	W	Z	T	S	G	I
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
U	L	E	H	F	C	R	N	K	V	Y	Q	X

Double Crossword

Choose either quick or cryptic clues - both fit the same grid.



Cryptic Clues:

Across

1. Lay off the wine (4)
3. Agitated girl with unusually neat figure (8)
8. Puts away in great style (4)
9. One way of saying one doesn't like it (8)
11. Progressed with amorous overtures? (4,8)
13. Concerning bets on races (6)
14. Walk slowly along the street with a list (6)
17. One of the smoothest parts of the course (7,5)
20. Remained and gave personal service (6,2)
21. Something final to any buffoon (4)
22. Threatening to re-adjust my ration (8)
23. Bank of Scotland (4)

Down

1. Vessels pilots take in the morning (8)
2. Keep changing dialect (7)
4. Always come up about six to refresh (6)
5. It provides an opportunity for advanced theatrical work (5,5)
6. A leading publication? (5)
7. A misshapen nose ages (4)
10. Simple way in which the affluent live (4,6)
12. Learnt by arrangement in Malawi (8)
15. One pair moved out of doors (4,3)
16. People enter for this sort of sport (6)
18. A joining of hands in marriage or work (5)
19. In tennis Wimbledon is one way to make progress (4)

Quick Clues:

Across

1. Image (4)
3. Set going (8)
8. Row (4)
9. Promontory (8)
11. Falsify (12)
13. Topics (6)
14. Fitting (6)
17. Betterment (12)
20. Baffle (8)
21. Despicable (4)
22. Scornful (8)
23. Dam across a river (4)

Down

1. Familiar (8)
2. Superintend (7)
4. Joyous (6)
5. Manufacturing (10)
6. Once more (5)
7. Whirlpool (4)
10. Insubordinate (10)
12. Majesty (8)
15. Archbishop (7)
16. Woodworker (6)
18. Lesser (5)
19. Frozen (4)

Sudoku

7			5				1	
		3			1	6	8	
9				7				2
	1	7	9				2	4
				2	3			
6	9				7	5		1
1					2			
	5	4	7			2		
	3				8		7	5

Fill in the grid above so that every column, every row and each of the 3x3 boxes contains all the digits from 1 to 9.

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTIONS >

1	5	8	7	6	4	2	3	9
4	9	2	8	3	1	6	7	5
6	7	3	9	2	5	1	8	4
7	1	5	6	8	3	9	4	2
8	4	6	1	9	2	7	5	3
3	2	9	5	4	7	8	1	6
2	3	7	4	1	6	5	9	8
9	6	1	3	5	8	4	2	7
5	8	4	2	7	9	3	6	1

LAST WEEK'S CROSSWORD SOLUTIONS: CRYPTIC - Across: 1 Obsolescent; 9 Isolate; 10 Lisle; 11 Hindi; 12 Dentist; 13 Impend; 15 Scorer; 18 Good day; 20 Lyric; 22 Least; 23 Leisure; 24 Secretaries. Down: 2 Brown; 3 Ovation; 4 Emends; 5 Colon; 6 Nastier; 7 Nightingale; 8 Test cricket; 14 Profane; 16 Collier; 17 Eyelet; 19 Deter; 21 Rouse. QUICK - Across: 1 Furthermore; 9 Stirrup; 10 Given; 11 Anele; 12 Ontario; 13 Levity; 15 Asleep; 18 Surplus; 20 Trait; 22 Edict; 23 Elation; 24 Undertaking. Down: 2 Unite; 3 Torrent; 4 Employ; 5 Might; 6 Reverie; 7 Established; 8 Incompetent; 14 Version; 16 Set-back; 17 Assent; 19 Lithe; 21 Alien.

Quiz

1. Whose husband was King Prasutagus?
2. Of which country is the Orszaggyules the national assembly?
3. Which heavyweight boxer collapsed after his defeat by Herbie Hide?
4. Which Mr Moto star was born Laszlo Loewenstein?
5. Where was the first Test match between England and Australia played in 1880?
6. Who is the Greek counterpart of the Roman Jupiter?
7. In which country did kung fu originate?
8. Which fruit comes from the plant Rubus idaeus?
9. Which condition was treated by the Kenny method?
10. Who won a director's Oscar for The Last Emperor?

Last week's solutions:

Quiz: 1 Dyslexia or alexia; 2 A bird; 3 The Wombles; 4 Elvis Costello; 5 William McKinley; 6 Parrot; 7 Dawn French; 8 Films; 9 Asteroid; 10 Sir Lancelot.

Niner: CAVERNOUS

Niner

Each number from 1 to 9 represents a different letter. Solve the clues and insert the letters in the appropriate squares to discover a word which uses all nine letters.

51381 gives a colour,
87114 gives a second colour,
9612 gives coloured.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

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A taste of quality Indian cuisine

Famed for its horn dance and its Best Kept Village success, Abbots Bromley has another thing worth putting it on the map – the Royal Ruchi restaurant.

This year, parishioners tasted double success in the large village category for East Staffordshire and the Community Council of Staffordshire's trophy for the whole county. And, to celebrate, they had a sample of what was on offer at the Bagot Street eatery with a six-course taster menu.

While the traditional horn dance dates back to the Middle Ages, the Royal Ruchi has only just over a decade of service to the village to fall back upon. It has a country cottage feel, with beams across the ceiling and has a subtle warm colour scheme.

Royal Ruchi in Abbots Bromley

The lamb course was a highlight of the evening

INDULGE

Owner Rafique Chowdhury has 30-plus years experience within the industry, having previously owned Saleem Bagh in Cannock and the Zafroni restaurants in both Cannock and Birmingham.

Its tasting menu is designed to increase the knowledge of the average Indian foodie while at the same time enhancing the Indian culinary experience. It allows the diner to sit back and not worry about what to choose from the menu, but instead to anticipate and indulge in the next offering.

My husband and I were greeted by Mr Chowdhury and his enganging staff and we were escorted to our table. Our welcome drinks of a glass of lemon sherbet and gin topped with Prosecco made the perfect start.

The first course presented to us was the Amuse Bouche, a spiced masala chicken soup with dhal puri – described as a mother's fresh homemade breakfast item cooked on Saturday mornings in the homes of Delhi. It was served with soft puffed bread filled with mildly spiced lentils – one of my favourites from the evening. For the second course, subz trio consisted of three small starter samples, namely chilli paneer – cubes of cottage cheese tossed with chilli; gol gappa – a crowd-pleasing Indian street food snack and aloo tikka – mashed potato patties mixed with spices, a north Indian delicacy found in the cafe-style eateries. We were pleasantly surprised by both.

Fish was the third course, comprising pan-grilled fillet of sea bass served on a bed of Goan creamy cheese spinach. The presentation was subtle, yet stunning and the sea bass was cooked to perfection. Next up was a sample of three different chicken options served with a salad mix. Murgh dalcha – delicately spiced chicken cutlets; malia tikka – Tandoori cooked chicken supreme and Hariyali tikka – chicken breast rubbed with an intoxicating paste. Again all three were thoroughly enjoyed.

We were next presented with the lamb course, their signature supreme carved Maharaja roast lamb, marinated in Mughal spices, served with moong chana daal, rice and freshly baked Tandoori bread. It looked and tasted magnificent – the star of the evening for us.

But there was more! The dessert was served on a slate plate, and consisted of three mini puds; rose gulab jamun – a berry sized sphere soaked in rose flavoured sugar syrup; tusha shinni– a lightly spiced, soft, sweet dessert, a recipe passed down from the chef's ancestors and sweet caramel ice cream.

The food and service was quality and Mr Chowdhury's passion to showcase all that was on offer was evident. Book at Royal Ruchi on 01283 840008.

BY SHARON OSCAR

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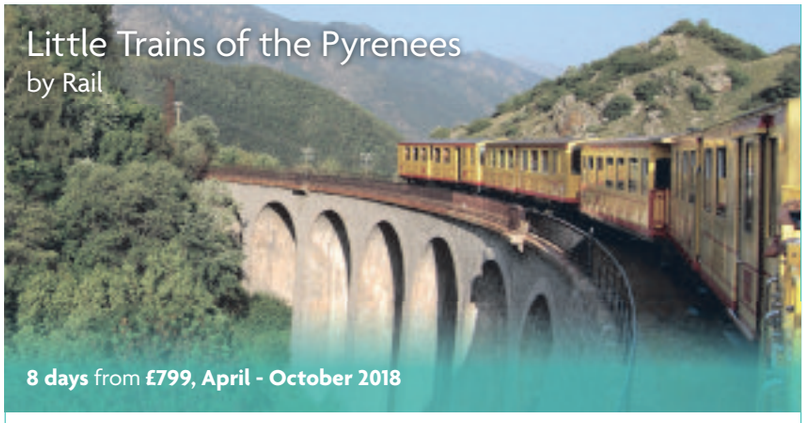

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Budget plans to boost property rental market too

The lettings market in the UK could see a boost from the Government's housing plans announced in the Budget with money being put into new homes for rent as well as for sale.

The Chancellor Philip Hammond also announced that there will be a consultation on incentives for landlords to offer longer tenancies and said that he wants to see more affordable homes being built for rent.

The idea of longer tenancies becoming the norm will also boost the Build to Rent sector which the Government has already backed.

Reaction has been mixed. David Cox, chief executive of the Association of Residential Letting Agents (ARLA) said a move towards more secured tenancies should be welcomed by the industry.

"We are pleased that the Government will consult on longer term and more secured tenancies, this feels to be in line with the holistic approach they are taking towards the rental market," he said.

Fareed Nabir, chief executive officer of online lettings app LetBritain, believes that there is an acknowledgement that a growing number of young people are 'stuck' in rental accommodation so it is helpful that the Budget has addressed the lettings market.

"With 7.2 million households likely to be in the rental market by 2025, the Chancellor has seized the opportunity to continue with the recent wave of reforms by offering tax incentives for landlords guaranteeing tenancies of at least 12 months," he said.

Security

"This should hopefully have a trickledown effect on rental prices, offering more financial manoeuvrability for tenants saving to buy their own house, something the Chancellor has made easier, while also providing additional security for renters," he added.

Longer term tenancies should be welcomed by tenants, according to expert Dominic Martin. "The Government's push for longer term tenancies is very welcome news for the build to rent sector and for renters," he said.

"Providing the customer with greater flexibility and security through long term tenancies is a positive step forward for the rental market and an acknowledgement that the customer should remain firmly at the heart of everything we do as these are people's homes," he pointed out.

But the Residential Landlords Association (RLA) questioned whether a consultation is needed. "With ever-growing numbers of families with children in private rented housing we recognise their needs for longer tenancies. The Budget could have acted on proposals we have made by providing tax relief for landlords prepared to offer longer tenancies and taking action against mortgage lenders who block them being granted," said RLA policy director David Smith.

"Instead we have yet another consultation adding to the 15 already ongoing which relate to the private rented sector. Tenants cannot live in consultations," he explained.

Chancellor's stamp duty ruling may push up house prices

House prices could rise in England and Wales in the next 12 months because of the decision to abolish stamp duty for most first-time buyers.

The change does not apply in Scotland.

While the market had lobbied for a temporary 'holiday' from stamp duty, the property tax paid by buyers, and it had been widely expected that there would be some sort of change, the total abolition of the tax took some by surprise.

Under the new measure first-time buyers paying £300,000 or less for a residential property will pay no Stamp Duty Land Tax (SDLT).

First-time buyers paying between £300,000 and £500,000 will pay SDLT at 5% on the amount of the purchase price in excess of £300,000, a reduction of £5,000 compared to the amount of SDLT they would have previously paid.

Supply

While it has been generally welcomed as good for the housing market, there are concerns that with not enough new homes being built a rush from first-time buyers could make the already short supply worse.

Now it is being suggested that the result of even fewer homes on the market will be higher prices and HMRC has confirmed this is likely.

"Paying no SDLT reduces the upfront cost of buying a home for first time buyers. This measure is expected to lead to a small increase in house prices in the first year after implementation," HMRC said in a statement.

The clarification from HMRC also suggests that to avoid paying stamp duty if buying as a couple both purchasers

have to be first time buyers. This raises the prospect that if a couple are buying and one has owned a home before they may not qualify for first time buyer status.

"A first-time buyer is defined as an individual or individuals who have never owned an interest in a residential property in the United Kingdom or anywhere else in the world and who intends to occupy the property as their main residence," the HMRC document says.

HMRC also points out that the abolition of stamp duty does not apply in Scotland which sets its own tax called Land and Buildings Transaction Tax (LLBT). It will apply in Wales until April 1, 2018, when Wales takes over property tax setting powers.

Already there are calls for Scotland to follow Hammond's announcement.

"Our view is that LLBT should be reviewed urgently because it is not delivering the expected benefit to the public purse in Scotland," said expert Simon Brown.

"It is causing stagnation in the middle and upper tiers of the property market, with a knock-on effect on the market overall. Now is the ideal time for the Scottish Government to give consideration to changing its policy here," he added.

Scotland's Budget is not due until next month.

But as houses for first time buyers generally fall below the £145,000 level where LBBT kicks in, there could be no change. From £145,000 LLBT increases in bands from 2% to 10% for properties valued at between £145,000 to £750,000 and 12% above that.

Training cash pledge will help smaller developers

Smaller and medium-sized builders will be able to contribute more to the construction of new homes in the UK after the Chancellor Philip Hammond announced more money for building and training.

Indeed the Federation of Master Builders (FMB) hailed it as a budget for builders. Chief executive Brian Berry said that the new target of building 300,000 new homes a year by the mid-2020s and the announcement of £44 billion of capital funding, loans and guarantees will boost the sector. In particular, he pointed out that a further £1.5 billion for the Home Building Fund to be targeted specifically at SME house builders can play a significant role in channelling crucial funding to this sector.

He also said that the £630 million fund to prepare small sites for development and proposals to require councils to deliver more new housing supply from faster to build smaller sites will provide opportunities to boost small-scale development.

He also believes that the second major challenge to getting new homes built is the skills crisis and the announcement on new money for training will be welcomed. "With Brexit round the corner the next few years will bring unprecedented challenges to the construction sector," said Berry.

"The Government will need to make sure that the sector continues to have access to skilled European

Union workers, but we are pleased that the Chancellor has today listened to the needs of SME builders," he added.

The sector is also encouraged by the commitment from Hammond to increase the supply of land for new homes. Expert Katherine McCullough said it is much needed.

"This long-term approach, which is supported by significant funding from the Government, marks a significant step towards meeting the ambitious plans for tackling the chronic housing shortage in the UK," she said.

However, Liz Jenkins, partner at Clyde & Co, said there will still be concerns about accessibility to workers from Europe post-Brexit. "It's going to take a lot more than retraining some adults to replace the potential outflow of migrant labour post-Brexit, particularly there is also a question of where these adults are going to come from as unemployment is currently low," she said.

"The construction industry therefore needs to work hard to promote a career switch into the sector and break down some of the stereotypes around the sector that could put people off. Retraining adults as construction workers would provide some labour but once they retire we'll be back to square one, unless we've trained a significant cohort of today's young people to fill the gap," she pointed out.

"Meeting the Chancellor's ambitious targets will require an available and skilled construction workforce. In the long term we need to be attracting the next generation of talent into the sector but we have an immediate priority to create the skills we need to deliver new homes today," she added.

"It is good to see the announcement of £34 million to develop construction skills across the UK but as ever, this needs a true partnership between public and private sector to make sure we make the most of this funding and creating the workforce that will deliver our target of 300,000 new homes a year."

Kia leading the World Car of Year 2018 nominations

Kia products have topped the nomination list for the World Car of the Year Awards with six nominations for its newly launched products around the world.

Indicating Kia's recent product offensive the WCOTY jurors will be considering the Picanto, Stonic, Niro and Stinger models in two different categories – World Car and World Urban Car.

Director and Vice Chair of the WCOTY jury, Mike Rutherford, commented: "It is nothing short of astonishing that Kia has beaten German giants BMW and Volkswagen into joint second place.

Flattering

"On its own it has more nominations than all the legendary American brands put together. That is something nobody would have predicted a decade ago."

Paul Philpott, president and chief executive of Kia Motors (UK) Limited, said: "Although nominations guarantee nothing, it is very flattering that our new models have received this kind of attention. We are delighted but not flattered that our product offensive has been recognised. We'll be flattered if one of them wins!"

The World Car of the Year is judged by 83 media jurors from 24 countries and contenders must be available for delivery across large parts of the globe during the first half of 2018.

Britain's roads will have driverless cars by 2021

By James Parker

The Government has announced that autonomous vehicles will be allowed on British roads without any human input inside or outside the car.

The decision has been made to allow Britain to become a world leader in developing autonomous technology, as the Chancellor Philip Hammond believes the industry could be worth £28bn by 2035 while supporting 27,000 jobs.

During his Autumn 2017 budget speech, he said: "There's perhaps no technology as symbolic for the revolution gathering pace around us as driverless cars."

However, the chancellor gave no clues as to how this will be achieved.

The first UK trial of autonomous vehicles took place during 2016 in Milton Keynes, when a Lutz Pathfinder driverless vehicle covered a 1.25-mile route along pathways.

Recently, British-based Jaguar Land Rover has trialled driverless vehicles in Coventry – the first time the technology has been used on open, public roads.

Charlie Henderson, roads expert at PA Consulting Group, said: "For self-driving vehicles to work effectively more must be done. While the Government should be applauded for its drive to develop autonomous technologies, any notion that autonomous vehicles are about to become a regular part of everyday life is ambitious.

"The reality is that AVs are not going to be a common sight on the roads any time soon.

"We can't get the roads in shape without a huge investment.

"Manufacturers are designing AVs on the assumption that roads are in good condition – with clear lane markings, unobscured signs and signals, and good quality surfaces. But we all know that's not the reality. We have a hugely diverse infrastructure with much of our road network."

Graeme Smith, CEO of autonomous technology company Oxbotica, said: "Following our meeting with the Prime Minister and Chancellor last week, it is good to see the UK technology sector being encouraged to accelerate development of a technology that will undoubtedly change society.

"Government support here has the potential to be repaid many times over as well, in terms of new, high-skilled jobs, enormous export potential, and improved productivity.

"By announcing these new measures and getting behind the drive towards autonomy, the UK government is showing it is not afraid of what the future holds, and that it wants to see Britain leading us into it."

Jaguar recently trialled driverless vehicles in Coventry

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Wolf has joined the race pack

A new member of the University of Wolverhampton Race Team (UWR) has joined the pack at the Telford Innovation Campus.

Following the success of the recent 'Wolves in Wolves' project which saw 30 wolves statues placed around Wolverhampton City Centre and then successfully auctioned off to raise money for charity, the University of Wolverhampton has commissioned a Race Team Wolf to be permanently on display in Telford.

Statues

Local artist Nigel James Kilworth, who worked on some of the original Wolves in Wolves statues, was commissioned by the University to create the Race Team Wolf. Having trained originally as a precision engineer and a graduate of the University's School of Art, Nigel also studied at the Jacob Kramer College of Art.

He said: "I really enjoyed the educational learning experience when painting two wolves for the successful Wolves in Wolves project and I am dedicated to promoting art in the local area.

"Although there were strict guidelines in place, which isn't my usual Fine Art approach to experimental painting, I could really feel that the university had a passion for racing and that the team was instrumental in promoting engineering and inspiring people to study at the university."

The inspiration on the design originates from the word winners, using the colours of the Race Team.

Nigel said: "The aim was to produce a piece of work that is kinetic from all angles taking the viewer on a journey up and down and around as they look at the different sides of the sculpture, juxtaposed to the experience of going round a race track yet at the same time keeping the wolf visible."

Professor Ian Oakes, Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the University of Wolverhampton, said: "The Wolves in Wolves project had a real impact locally and we still have our commissioned wolf, Hunter, in place outside the George Wallis Building where the Wolverhampton School of Art is located.

"We wanted to create a legacy for the successful Race Team in Telford and decided that it would be fitting to commission another wolf which would take pride of place at our Telford Innovation Campus."

The Race Team recently finished second in the national Formula 3 Cup competition for the second year running.

Your local, family-run motor business

Commercial feature

You would find it difficult to match T Wall Ford when it comes to the amount of loyalty shown by the dealership's many long-standing customers.

T Wall Ford's parent company, Worcester Carsales, was first founded by Mr Derrick Grieveson in Worcester in 1953. Ten years later, in 1963, the first dealership moved across to a new site on Hylton Road, Worcester. In 1973, the founder's son, Stuart Grieveson, joined the family-owned company, and today he is managing director.

Over the last 60 years, the family-run Worcester Carsales has seen three generations of the Grieveson family enjoy working for the firm, and to date, Mr Grieveson's grandchildren work within the group.

Happy staff should mean contented customers, and the fact that T Wall Ford has always enjoyed high levels of repeat business is evidence of this. This desirable situation is due to its customers being provided with exceptional levels of service across all departments, from new and used car sales through to parts and aftersales.

Employees are highly valued and encouraged to develop their careers through the company. They are able to move up through the ranks if they wish, and are provided with all the skills and knowledge to do so. So that the team are able to achieve great job satisfaction and excel in the delivery of customer care, considerable importance is placed into the value of staff training.

As a result, numerous members of the team remain with Worcester Carsales and T Wall Ford for many years, which is extremely refreshing to note in an industry usually known for fast staff turnover. It also helps considerably when it comes to the consistency of customer care.

T Wall has always enjoyed repeat business

Test drive the new Ford Fiesta ST-Line

Lee Paulton (sales manager), Stefan Reed (Motability), Rob Winfield, Ryan Hopwood, Steve Preece, Mark Bradbury and Nigel Sydenham (Motability)

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T Wall Ford's fully-accredited Motability Specialists are Nigel Sydenham and Stefan Reed. Popular with their customers, they both take time to discover the needs of all people who gain their vehicles through the excellent Motability scheme.

Managing Director, Stuart Grieveson said: "We have a strong workforce with an excellent work ethic. Our dealership has proved successful through everyone working as a team, so that each and every customer gains the best possible service on each and every occasion. We would like to thank our many customers for their incredible loyalty and never forget that they have a choice."

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The mpg figures quoted are sourced from official EU-regulated test results (EU Directive and Regulation 692/2008), are provided for comparability purposes and may not reflect your actual driving experience.

T Wall Ford for competitive servicing

Commercial feature

T Wall Ford is part of a family-run business that has been trading in the West Midlands for over 65 years.

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High quality service delivered by Ford technicians is promised plus UK and European Roadside Assistance.

"At T Wall Ford we always have plenty to offer, especially with UK and European Roadside Assistance when your vehicle has a Ford service," said a spokesman.

"Ford Motorcraft always has attractive prices and including parts and labour. We offer value for money and always use the latest equipment and quality parts. All from a team that knows your Ford better than anyone else."

Great service is offered at all-inclusive prices. From servicing and repairs to MOTs and tyres.

The team at T Wall Ford

You will find everything you need at T Wall Ford. Specially designed for Ford older vehicles it offers clear, transparent pricing with no hidden extras.

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Stourbridge Chronicle Thursday, November 30, 2017

Sheer driving pleasure from world's number one roadster

Affordable to buy and run with a fantastic fun factor!

By John Griffiths

There are some cars that just get into your head – and your heart.

For me, one of those is the Mazda MX-5: not family friendly or overly practical, but one of the most affordable routes to sheer driving pleasure that you could wish for.

It comes as no surprise at all that this sleek roadster has been around for almost 30 years and well over a million sold, making it the world's best-selling sports car.

It's launch raised a few critical eyebrows, coming at a time when most manufacturers had dropped the concept of the two-seater sports car in favour of the 'hot hatch' – but motorists loved it.

Although the current model has been around for two years now, it is continuing to win 'best in class' awards.

There was (and still is) a purity about it. A front engined, rear drive and relatively simple car with the promise of wind-in-your-hair motoring that makes us nostalgic for the golden age of motoring.

There are five models in the range, from £18,495 to £23,695, plus the RF models which come with an electrically-folding hard roof (£22,195 to £28,995) instead of the manually operated folding soft top.

There's a choice of 1.5 litre, 131Ps or 2.0 litre, 160Ps petrol engines: both providing plenty of real-world performance for today's driving conditions. The 0 to 62mph performance figures are 8.4 and 8.6 seconds respectively, while official fuel consumption figures are a respectable 46.3 and 39.2mpg.

The MX-5 has all the modern conveniences

But a 'sports' designation and statistics apart, there's more to a car like this. I recall with genuine pleasure those times when I gave the motorway a miss in favour of a longer trip home, through leafy country lanes, at a gentle pace with the roof down. A great way to blow away the stresses of the day.

The new MX-5 is something of a rarity in that it's actually a little smaller than it's predecessor, in a move to make the car more nimble. It also benefitted from Mazda's 'SKYACTIV' technology, featuring efficient, high compression engines and a chassis/body structure which is both stronger and lighter. In fact it weighs under 1,100kgs even with an average-sized driver on board.

The rewards come by way of improved economy, lower emissions, and of course agility.

Add to that the ideal 50:50 balance of weight between front and rear, the feel and response to changes in direction of rear wheel drive and you have a car which is truly rewarding to drive. You feel a part of well-honed machine.

As well as being shorter, with minimal overhangs, this latest MX-5 has the lowest centre of gravity yet and is fitted with a limited slip differential to aid cornering.

While the MX-5 is smaller overall, there is still plenty of room in the cockpit for two adults in comfort. Luggage space, at 127 litres, is enough for a good-sized suitcase or a couple of average wheelie bags.

The test car on this occasion was a 2.0 litre in mid-range SE-L Nav trim, with an on-the-road price of £21,645. While staying true to the ethos of the traditional roadster, it came with modern convenience features such as climate control air conditioning, a colour touchscreen display for the navigation and connectivity systems (including internet systems) and the audio system. The driver has two speakers integrated into the headrest, so there's no need to annoy others even when listening to music with the roof down.

A two-seater won't suit everyone, but the MX-5 has won many hearts and minds with its combination of attributes.

It's as affordable to buy and run as some of today's rather anonymous hatchbacks, but with a fun factor they don't even approach, plus the whole world of relaxed, top down motoring when conditions allow. It's not only me – remember this car is the world's number one in its field.

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3. Ensure that you are given any KC documentation, if pedigree.
Whilst Midland News Association publications take great care to avoid publication of advertisements from Puppy Farmers we cannot accept any liability should readers purchase from this kind of establishment.

5 Business & Farming

Business Opportunities

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6 Property

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8 Motoring

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07521 281140.

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BARGAIN

PEUGEOT 207
1.6 HDi SPORT
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£30 road tax.
£2,250.
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PEUGEOT 207 MILLESIM 75
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Only 51700 miles, 10 months MoT, petrol, 1396cc.
Lovely blue colour.
Excellent condition.
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Hatchback.
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AUTOMATIC

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Wolverhampton

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LOOK

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9 Local Information

Public Notices

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(remember to include a name/contact number for confirmation of receipt)

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Pursuant to the Trustee Act 1925 any persons having a claim against or an interest in the Estate of the aforementioned deceased, late of Tudor Manor Residential Home 2 Brook Street Stourbridge formerly of 8 Corbyns Hall Road Pensnett Brierley Hill DY5 4RA, who died on 28/04/2017, are required to send particulars thereof in writing to the undersigned Solicitors on or before 02/02/2018, after which date the Estate will be distributed having regard only to claims and interests of which they have had notice.
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10 Personals

General

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Geoff Hurst scoring the final goal – and his hat-trick – for England in the World Cup final of 1966

Morgan Gibbs-White played a key role in England's under-17s' World Cup triumph

Legendary Wolves player Ron Flowers

How Ron also played his part for World Cup heroes

Getting stuck in – Wolves legend Ron Flowers, right, in action

SPORTING FEATURE

By Joseph Masi

WOLVES youngster Morgan Gibbs-White played a key role as England's under-17s spectacularly triumphed at last month's World Cup.

The winger netted against the USA in the quarter-finals before scoring again in the final as the Three Lions came from behind to hammer Spain 5-2.

It's a result that has led to England fans dreaming the young starlets may one day replicate their form for the senior side. And it seems whenever the national side does triumph on the world stage, a Wolves player is at the heart of it.

Of course, England's one and only major tournament win came at the World Cup on home turf in 1966. And while Wolves legend Ron Flowers didn't kick a ball in anger at that tournament, he certainly played his part.

Spotted as a teenager by scouts while playing for Doncaster Rovers, Flowers joined Wolves in 1952.

Convince

Initially boss Stan Cullis had to convince Ron's father Jack to allow him to sign – with his dad preferring his son stayed in Yorkshire to continue an apprenticeship with train firm LNER Locomotive.

But Ron and Stan got their way and for the next 15 years Flowers became integral to a Wolves side that enjoyed huge success.

Playing at either wing-half or centre-half, he formed an outstanding partnership with Peter Broadbent. And that formed the bedrock of the Wolves teams that won the League Championship in 1954, 1958 and 1959, as well as the FA Cup in 1960.

In total, Flowers made 512 appearances for the club between 1952 and 1967, scoring 37 goals – putting him sixth in the club's all-time list of appearance makers.

His form in gold and black also allowed him to shine on the international stage.

In 49 appearances for England, Flowers scored 10 goals and played in the 1962 World Cup.

But in an exclusive interview he said there was a particular reason why he was included in Sir Alf Ramsey's triumphant squad in 1966.

As the oldest member of the group, Flowers revealed he was there to set an example. "I was there to do a job," he said.

"As far as I had been concerned, my England career was finished. I hadn't been expecting the call."

"As far as I had been concerned, my England career was finished. I hadn't been expecting the call."

Flowers also came a whisker away from playing in the biggest game in English football.

Before the final in 1966, Jack Charlton had told Ramsey he was struggling with a cold. And that prompted the boss to put Flowers on stand-by.

"The message was, be ready," explains Flowers.

"It was not, as you might expect however, the cause of any nerves, or indeed a restless night. It didn't make any difference to my thinking.

Private

"I knew whatever he might have come down with, he would play.

"Do you really think Jack Charlton was going to miss out on the World Cup final because of a cold?

"It would have needed to have been one heck of a cold."

In those days, players who didn't play in the final didn't receive a winner's medal. But Flowers' role in England's greatest achievement would eventually be acknowledged.

In 2009, Prime Minister Gordon Brown invited all 10 players who missed out to Downing Street for a private reception.

They were then finally presented with a medal which they got to parade on the pitch at Wembley at half-time during England's clash with Andorra.

Book on boss Taylor set for publication

THE biography of the former Villa, Wolves and England boss Graham Taylor was being released this week. Sir Elton John has provided the foreword for the book, Graham Taylor: In His Own Words, which was going on sale today (Thursday). Published by Peloton, it is available as a hardback, priced £19.99

Taylor, who passed away aged 72 in January, had been working on the publication since 2014 with journalist Lionel Birnie. It was completed with support from Taylor's family. His widow Rita said it had been a 'very important' project for him.

The book covers Taylor's playing days at Grimsby Town and Lincoln City and into his managerial career, guiding Watford from the Fourth Division to the top flight, on to Villa and then as national boss. It goes on to cover England's failure to qualify for the 1994 World Cup, and the impact of subsequent press coverage on his family – before restoring his reputation as club boss with spells at Wolves and back at Watford.

Mayor leads pitch as 3G facilities unveiled

THE Mayor Sandwell was officially unveiling two 3G artificial grass pitches at the George Salter Academy this week. Councillor Ahmadul Haque was launching the facilities yesterday (Wednesday).

The project was made possible thanks to a £462,000 grant from the Premier League & The FA Facilities Fund, which is delivered by the Football Foundation. The pitches will replace two existing sand-dressed AGPs, which were in poor condition due to age, with new floodlit all-weather playing surfaces.

They will not only benefit the Academy's students, but also partner clubs Tantany Lions FC and Greets Green Albion FC who train and play there and are expected to introduce 14 new teams collectively.

Founded in 2000, the Football Foundation is the largest sports charity in the UK funded by the Premier League, The FA and Government, via Sport England. It develops new and refurbished facilities in order to improve the quality and experience of playing sport at grassroots level.

Captain at double in England success

SKIPPER Steph Houghton led by example as England Women roared to a 4-0 World Cup qualifying success over Bosnia & Herzegovina at Walsall's Banks's Stadium last Friday night.

Houghton netted twice in front of a sell-out crowd, with Manchester City team-mate Nikita Parris and Chelsea's Fran Kirby also on target.

A first victory for caretaker boss Mo Marley kept England hot on the heels of Group One leaders Wales ahead of Tuesday's game against Kazakhstan at Colchester.

Houghton headed England into a 19th-minute lead following Alex Greenwood's corner. England's Barcelona striker Toni Duggan was denied by the woodwork and Danielle Carter squandered a golden chance.

Less than a minute into the second period, Duggan set up Parris to make it 2-0. Houghton fired her second direct from a 54th-minute free-kick and after Aida Hadzic fouled Carter in the area, Kirby completed the scoring from the penalty spot.

Sport

Wolves legend Flowers' key part in World Cup win

Page 39

Glassboys claim scalp to progress

Stourbridge 2 Bradford PA 1

CUP kings Stourbridge claimed another higher division scalp after beating Bradford Park Avenue in the FA Trophy and will travel to Leamington for the first round proper on December 16.

A Shane Killock own goal and Luke Shearer strike ensured the Glassboys made progress in Monday night's replay following a 1-1 draw at Park Avenue on Saturday.

Stour were dominant in the first half but were denied by some good goalkeeping from Steve Drench.

Shearer thought he had won Stourbridge a penalty early on when he clashed with Mark Ross in the penalty area but the winger was shown a yellow card for simulation.

Luke Benbow had a 25-yard free-kick well saved by Drench and then the keeper did well to deny Leon Broadhurst.

But Drench had no answer in the 49th minute from a Tom Tonks long throw as his own defender Killock diverted a header into the top corner.

Broadhurst had a golden chance to make it two but headed over from six yards after Perry had nodded Benbow's cross into his path.

Shearer used his pace to power through the Bradford defence before calmly slotting past Drench in the 69th minute to make it 2-0. Bradford, of the National League North, made it a nervy finale when Adam Boyes scored.

l The replay was forced when Nicky Clee levelled Kyle Perry's strike in Saturday's game.

Chess club misses out on handicap in tight trophy game

THE first result of the week for Stourbridge Chess Club was the adjourned game from the Worcestershire division 2 at Halesowen. All five games were drawn to give a 2½ each scoreline.

Birmingham division 4 team players were in action in the Townshend Trophy. A weakened team faced a division 5 team Sutton Coldfield away.

There was not much between the teams in terms of grading and with their half point handicap this was always going to be tight. The result was 3-3 over the boards but Stourbridge lost on handicap.

On Wednesday, Stourbridge were at home to Mercia in Dudley division 2. This was match was used to give a game to second team players who had not played on Monday with Trevor Tennant making his debut on board 3. Individual Results were: Ron Evans 1/2 Barry Smith; Jeremy Humphries 1/2 D.Hodkinson; Trevor Tennant 0-1 P.Hodkinson; Carl Birch 0-1 Kevan Ward

To join Stourbridge Chess Club, call Dave Scriven on 01384 423642 or visit www.stourbridgechess.f9.co.uk

Martial artists belt up to make grade

The black belts, Fitz Gordon and Justin Thomas

TEN martial artists have become 1st dan black belts after passing their grading with flying colours.

Jake Allen Brunn, Ellis Homer, Luke Stanley, William Beard, Rowan Meacher, Alex Montkon, Ben Gowland, Greg Gowland, Yoel Perry and Henry Johnston are all members of Young Gloves Karate and undertook the grading on November 18.

A club spokesman said all had performed incredibly well for the grading, under extreme pressure for more than three hours in front of guest examiner, Sensei Fitz Gordon, 6th Dan.

"The standard, as with years gone by, was incredibly high with many getting distinction and merits for their skills," the spokesman added.

Young Gloves Karate established itself in 1999 at Cookley school with 20 pupils.

It now teaches more than 350 students in 13 different schools, including in Stourbridge, and boasts English karate champions and European Champions in traditional karate.

STAGE SET FOR MASSIVE DAY

South Leicester 26 Stourbridge 26

AS predicted, this was a close game and honours remain even between the teams at two games each plus a draw.

Stour did manage to secure three valuable league points with a four-try bonus. South Leicester only scored two but it was the kicking machine, Rickie Aley who notched up 16 points and made the difference.

Stour kicked off with wind advantage and didn't take long to get on the scoreboard with Robbie Forbes pouncing for his second try in Stourbridge colours. Three minutes later, Forbes sent George Morgan clear for a try, converted by Joe Heatley.

South hit back with hooker Adam Johnson going over, Aley converting the first of his 100 per cent tally before then kicking a penalty.

Charlie Jeavons-Fellows raced through for Stour's third try, Forbes adding the extras.

South kicked off second half and, entirely on script, No 10 Aley took full advantage of the conditions, adding three points to his tally just seven minutes in.

Converted

It took until the 65th minute before the hosts took the lead for the first time, through a try by replacement Adam Nunney. Aley converted and three minutes later kicked a penalty to leave Stour facing defeat.

However, replacement hooker Jack Lea bowled over the line to score a well deserved try. Forbes added the conversion to level the scores.

Saturday sees a massive day's rugby with the official launch of the new RUGBY 365 artificial grass pitch at Stourton Park. A bumper crowd is expected for the free event.

Proceedings start at noon with an opening ceremony by ex-Leicester and England star Peter Wheeler. Stourbridge u-14s take on Hinckley u-14s and there is a league clash of second v first as Stourbridge host Hinckley. Then DK Vixens take on an Invitation Women's' XV at 5.30pm.

Charlie Jeavons-Fellows goes over for the third Stourbridge try of the afternoon

Lions in win over early pacesetters

STOURBRIDGE Lions moved up to seventh with an exciting 36-22 home win over Bromsgrove, one of the early pacesetters.

The first half, on the new all-weather pitch at Stourbridge, was nip and tuck throughout. The Lions struck with an Owen Williams unconverted try. A penalty try to the visitors followed by another unconverted try saw Bromsgrove lead 12-5.

Cass Brookes finished off a Stour try and Sam Wilson's conversion made it level, although a penalty from Bromsgrove left them ahead at the break.

The second half opened with a penalty goal from Wilson to bring the sides level again and another Wilson penalty gave the home side a narrow lead. A converted Bromsgrove try gave the visitors a 22-18 lead, but from then Lions took control.

Another penalty from Wilson was followed a Sam Montieri try, converted by Wilson and the Lions were never headed after that. Steff Thorpe went over for the bonus and penalty gave a 14-point advantage.

My time has come, insists boxer Clarke

HALESOWEN'S super middleweight sensation Lennox Clarke believes his time has finally come.

The 26-year-old is ready to make up for lost time when he challenges Jahmaine Smyle for the vacant International Boxing Organisation Continental Super Middleweight Title on Saturday.

The bout will take place in Smyle's hometown at the Leicester Arena as part of Cyclone Promotions' bumper All Or Nothing Show, topped with Sweden's undefeated European super lightweight champion Anthony Digit defending his belt against Wiltshire's former English champion Joe Hughes.

After seeing his own English Title shot stall, Clarke is determined to steal the show, which will be aired live on Channel 5. "This is my time now," exclaimed Clarke. "I've been waiting for a while for a title shot and finally it's here.

"Jahmaine is strong and tough and aggressive. I'm ready to put in a performance and bring that belt home."

'All Or Nothing' also features Commonwealth cruiserweight King Luke Watkins. 'The Duke' makes his first defence against Southport's former British title challenger Mike Stafford, while unbeaten Wolverhampton bantamweight Kyle Williams will fight for the fourth time this year.

Lichfield super flyweight Brad Foster, Josh Quailey, and Chantelle Cameron complete the card. Tickets can be purchased from http://www.cyclonepromotions.com

Yeltz slip closer to bottom after loss

Matlock Town 2 Halesowen 0

HALESOWEN Town slipped to defeat at Matlock and are just four points off bottom club Sutton Coldfield.

Yeltz had to do without Ivor Lawton for most of the game after he went off injured on 13 minutes.

The unmarked Ted Cribley headed Matlock into the lead five minutes before the break. Three minutes later, poor defending let Jake Green in for the second.

Danny Bragoli had a goal ruled out for offside on 58 minutes.

Daniel Udoh has returned to League Two side Crewe after completing his successful loan spell.

★★★

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